

THE SPOTTER



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THE SPOTTER



THE SPOTTER

A ROMANCE OF THE
OIL REGION

By *WILLIAM W. CANFIELD*

Author of "Legends of the Iriquois"



R. F. FENNO & COMPANY

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*In Memory of
Mary Lisbeth Canfield,
a gentle critic
who watched with deepening interest
the growth of these pages.*



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THE SPOTTER.

CHAPTER I.

RESISTING A TEMPTATION.

"I DON'T see why you should have objections to leasing your farm, Mr. Cameron," said Mrs. Fisher, somewhat awkwardly raising her gold-rimmed eyeglasses to the ridge of a red and pudgy nose, and gazing curiously at the man to whom she had spoken.

"Perhaps not, ma'am," replied Cameron. "I have heard that some people are able to see in a painting only flat streaks of color."

"I didn't say anything about paintings, did I?" asked the woman, innocent of the sarcasm. "I was talking about your farm, which you ought to sell, or lease, now that you have the chance, and give your wife and daughter the opportunity to take their places in a circle where they would shine. It's your duty, Mr. Cameron, and you know it."

"Mrs. Cameron and Agnes adorn their home,

ma'am, and are welcome members of the circle in which we have moved," insisted Cameron.

"Well, there won't be any circle here for them to adorn very long, Mr. Cameron, and you know it. Now look at the matter sensibly. Here's our farm of only a hundred and ten acres, and Fisher sold it outright for seventy-five thousand dollars. The Tubbses have sold their eighty acres for fifty thousand and a sixteenth royalty. They were offered a twelfth the first time the man came to see them, but Mrs. Tubbs said she wouldn't let Tubbs sell for less than a sixteenth, and the man never hesitated a minute, but took them up on the spot. The Nortons have leased for a big pile cash down and a royalty that will bring them more money every month than they ever saw before. Sam Edgert, for his place with its old, tumble-down buildings and land that won't raise white beans, got a clean hundred thousand. He's going to move his family away next week. Everybody else in the neighborhood has either sold out or leased for big money, and they are getting out of this section just as fast as they can, and going to places where they may cut a dash."

"No doubt, ma'am. I expect they all will do that."

"Of course, they will, because they've got the cash to do it with, and that's more than most of the folks in Bradan and Oleford can say—leastwise, lots of them that's credited with loads of money don't look

as though they had any to spare. Why, last Sunday me and Fisher went to their high-falutin' fashionable 'Piscopal church at Bradan. I wanted to see whether they had any real style about them, and there wasn't mor'n two women in the church that had any jewelry on to speak of. I didn't see but one watch chain besides mine, and that was a skimpy thing. Hardly one of them wore mor'n one ring, or possibly two, and I didn't see a bracelet or necklace in the whole church."

"It must have been very dispiriting, ma'am. I really don't see how you could enjoy the service under such circumstances."

She gave him a quick glance, but the impenetrable face of the Scotchman betrayed no clue as to whether he had spoken in jest or in earnest.

"Well, at any rate, I let them know that there was folks who had lived within fifty miles of them all their lives who was just as good as anybody at Bradan. When the meeting was over, Fisher stopped and asked a man how much they rented their best pews for by the year. The man hunted up the sexton, who pointed out a pew pretty well up in front which he said we could have for a hundred dollars. 'Ain't you got anything better'n that?' I asked. He said there wasn't any better pew in the church, and that it was one of the highest in price. 'Well,' I said, loud enough for a lot of them to hear, 'we expect to travel a good deal and may not be here all the

time to use it, but if it is the best you've got, we'll take it so we can have it when we return from abroad.' I thought I would let 'em know that we didn't care for expense."

Cameron smiled and nodded slightly, as if in approval of her course.

"You might just as well be in the swim as the rest of your neighbors, Cameron," she continued. "Fisher says that you own two hundred acres, and that you don't owe a dollar on it. You could sell it for an awful pile, and go out into the world where folks would be bowing and scraping to you on every hand. You could travel, as me and Fisher are going to do, or you could go to the Assembly, or be some other high officer. They say any man can get office if he has a little money to spend. But if you hang on much longer, you may lose it all, for the land has been leased on every side, and when wells are sunk on the next door territory they're likely to drain yours, and then it won't be worth shucks."

"It will remain still as good a farm as it is to-day, Mrs. Fisher."

"Oh, pshaw, Cameron, you're childish! If you don't want the money for yourself, you have no right to keep Mrs. Cameron and Agnes from enjoying it. I'm sorry they ain't here, so I could spunk them up in the way of persuading you to take a good offer when one is knocking at your door, and not hold off till you lose it all."

"Mrs. Fisher," said Cameron with sudden earnestness, "I suppose it would be quite impossible for me to make you understand that I do not wish either to sell or to lease my farm at any price, now or hereafter. With much labor and care this place has been brought to the perfection in which you see it, and here we have all the comforts of that simple life which pleases us. Great riches poured into our laps could make us neither more independent nor contented. Indeed, we scarcely would know what to do with wealth which we had not won, for we are not accustomed to idleness and fashion, and in the attempt to live that way we would be most unhappy. In the grasp for the glittering halo, the substance, which we love, would escape.

"I do not know whether you have taken the trouble to come to the old neighborhood from friendly interests, or have been sent here by those who are anxious to procure the lease of the Cameron farm. I will think that your motive has been entirely innocent, and thank you for the advice, though declining to follow it. I am sorry Mr. Fisher did not accompany you. Give him my kind regards, and say to him that when he tires of the grand ways of the rich, and when his eyes weary from gazing upon great sights, to come to the valley. I will fit him out in clothing that will not be injured if he lies at full length upon the ground, and with a basket, filled with home-cooking, we will go out along some of the trout streams

where we have passed many a happy day, and be once more the same old neighbors."

The woman looked at him a moment with puzzled expression. "You are a queer man, Mr. Cameron," she said at length.

"Yes, I suppose that is true. We ever are wondering why others may not see things from our standpoint. To me, it is without explanation that people from choice should desert the real, substantial and wholesome for that which has in it only the ceaseless quest for the new, the showy and the frothy. To you, it is equally inexplicable that one should wish to remain in this isolated place; or why I should love the hills and valleys, the fields, the trees back yonder in the woods, the cattle there in the pasture, and the horses here in the barn. Why, just look at them, ma'am."

Cameron put his hands beside his mouth, forming the bell of a trumpet, and gave a call.

"O-o-o-o-o, s-o-o-o k-e-e-e!" it rang out across the meadow, and when it came to the pasture the cattle raised their heads and listened for its repetition; and then, turning from the rich feed, tossed their horns and hurried away down the lane, jostling and crowding in the race to see which should come first to the gate in answer to the master's voice. A collie, that had been lying in the shade a few paces away, sat up and watched the procession with all the interest of a well-taught dog who knows that he may at any moment be called upon to take part in the proceedings.

"There, ma'am, I'd rather enjoy that sight than all the parties and balls, receptions, theatres and society events in the most brilliant metropolis of fashion and splendor in the world. No pleasure which any number of thousands could buy would recompense me for its loss."

Though Mrs. Fisher was not a woman of fine sentiment, she could not be wholly insensible to the deep feeling which Cameron expressed, nor was she unmindful of the fact that he had the argument on his side. For nearly three months she had been engaged in the attempt to make the plunge into the social circles of Bradan, and in so doing she had met with experiences which somewhat cooled her ardor. Nevertheless, she made the trip to Cameron farm upon the suggestion of her husband, and at the request of some of the men who were attempting to secure a lease or negotiate the purchase of this splendid oil territory. As a disinterested friend and old neighbor, she expected to meet with some success. She would make one more effort, and, as she stepped forward to her carriage, she turned and said:

"Mr. Cameron, with the money you could get from your farm——"

"Good-day, ma'am, and pardon me for not waiting to hear what I could do with it. My cattle are wondering why I called them and am not at the gate to let them through."

And he turned and walked rapidly to the lane.

CHAPTER II.

THE COMING OF THE DRILL.

DUNCAN CAMERON was born in Scotland, and at the time of the opening of our story was in his forty-second year. His parents had been well-to-do, but before he was out of his teens, he was left an orphan and his property was given in charge of a guardian. Duncan chose the profession of civil engineering, and just after his majority he entered his last term at college. A few days later he received a letter from 'America that changed the course of his life, for he left college at once, converted his little holding into money at a considerable sacrifice, and came to this country as soon as he could complete his arrangements.

Three years previously, 'Andrew Laing, with his wife and daughter Alice, neighbors of the Camerons, left their Scottish home and came to America with the hope of bettering their condition. Young Cameron and Alice had been lovers from the time they were first at school, and it was well understood that when Duncan had gained his profession, he would

follow the Laings to America and marry Alice. The letter which came to him brought news of the death of Mr. and Mrs. Laing within a few weeks of each other. Alice, he was told, had taken service in the home of some people of his own nationality. The thought of her loneliness and bereavement drove other things from his mind, and soon after Alice received the announcement that he was coming, he was by her side. Their marriage took place within a few weeks, and then for eight years Cameron pursued his profession with fair success. In the course of his work, Duncan met the opportunity for purchasing a fine tract of land in one of the richest valleys of Western Pennsylvania, and so the Cameron farm came into his possession. With the money saved in the practice of his profession, Cameron was able to make many improvements upon his farm, and in a brief time he surrounded himself with those comforts which come only to those American farmers who toil industriously and intelligently for a term of many years.

Cameron was a student, a thinker, a lover of nature in every form. He was happy and contented with his home, for there he found independence and freedom. The farmers in the neighborhood saw that he was ever a busy man, and while they could spend half a summer's day talking to little or no purpose over a rail fence, Cameron had work to do—and his fields, buildings and stock showed the result of his

attention. It was but natural that these curious old Pennsylvania families should think that "the Scotchman," as Cameron was commonly called, was altogether too painstaking with his crops and stock, and was foolish in his treatment of his wife and daughter, for Duncan was at all times gallant, gentlemanly, considerate and unselfish toward Alice. His first thoughts were ever of her—and his next of their daughter, Agnes.

"W'y, he never lets one of his wimmin pail a cow," said old Tubbs.

"Na, that he don't," replied his neighbor, Norton, "an' you never see how he worked to git the spring water in his kitchen, so there wouldn't be no call fer his wife to tote water from the pump in the yard. He's jest silly over that gal, too. W'y, she's eighteen if she's a day, but her pap takes her in his lap an' holds her like a baby, an' plays with her as if she want mor'n ten."

"An' jest look at the clothes he buys, an' the books an' fixin's, an' pictures he puts in his house," continued Tubbs, with fine scorn.

Norton shook his head. "You an' me can't spend that way. He must have had a pile to start with, an' he'll use it up afore he's as old as us."

Though they did not approve of his ways, Cameron's neighbors could not say that he was without success—even if he did love his wife and daughter and was considerate of his hired men, and kind to

his beasts. They learned, as people in small country towns and neighborhoods always learn such things, that Cameron owed nothing upon his place, paid for whatever he bought when he took it from the store, and had money in the bank.

"W'y, he packs apples in barrels an' sends 'em away to the city, an' gits big pay for 'em," said Tubbs in awe. "An' he puts butter up in fancy boxes an' sells it to private customers who writes for it. I hearn, too, that he made five hunder dollars on honey last year, an' I don't know how many hunder on his hens an' eggs, though they say it most breaks his heart to kill a chicken. He sells them Durham carves of his at big prices, too. Week before las' he got seven hunder dollars for a yearling. I tell you, Norton, the Scotchman's a schemer."

"My Gawd, Tubbs, he is a schemer. I hearn he's the only farmer in McKean county that can draw his check agin money of his own in the Bradan bank."

"May not be so long, though," said Tubbs with a shake of his head.

"Oil?" queried Norton.

"Yes, oil. It's here jest as well as it's at Oil City and Tidioute, and them places down the river. Every wildcat well this way has struck it, and it's here. You and me will sell or lease our farms for thousands afore two year."

"I hope so, Tubbs, for the mortgage on mine's due next year December."

"Mine's due afore that; but I've got a writin' that it'll be renewed, an' you better git one, for the oil's here, an' it's going' to be found. I tell ye, Norton, I kin almost hear the thumpin' of the drill."

And in a few months old Tubbs did hear "the thumpin' of the drill." The prospectors pushed out and on, up one valley after another, along rocky streams and over ranges of wooded hills, often striking "dry sand," but as frequently piercing veins that sent their thick, black flow to the surface and filled the pockets of the fortunate owners with bulging rolls of greenbacks.

From every part of the country came the money to finance the companies that were engaged in the prospecting. Conservative business men, careful members of the various professions, keen and eager bankers, clerks, mechanics, laboring men who had a little store of cash put by for the proverbial rainy day, widows, guardians of trust funds, men who had speculated all their lives, and men who never turned a penny save by labor—thousands upon thousands in number cashed their securities, mortgaged their holdings, got the money somehow and somewhere, and "went into oil." The craze for investment grew with each report that came to hand of a successful well in a new territory, and men were fairly beside themselves in the strife to secure leases. Agents went abroad by night and by day over the hills and through the valleys seeking the owners of every

square rod of a vast section which heretofore had been given up to lumbering and very indifferent farming, making leases for the companies that were forming yonder in the towns and cities, and which were coming into this wilderness to join in the mad scramble for sudden wealth.

And what of the people who owned farms and tracts of land in the new oil territory? Many of them were lumbermen who helped to strip the land of their marketable trees and raft the logs down the streams to the river, and thence away to the cities along the Ohio and Mississippi. They bought the wild, rocky and brush-tangled lots because they did not know what else to do when lumbering failed them; and here, scores of miles from business centers, upon roads that followed the logways of the timber haulers, in the rudest of rough board or log-houses, they eked out a bare existence. Little more may be said of their lives. Their surroundings were dreary, rough, uninteresting. Schools were almost unknown; churches a like quantity; neighbors, miles from each other.

Even in the most favorable localities, like the valley in which lay the Cameron farm, the conditions were primitive, and the eight miles over the divide to Tuna, the little station on the branch of a coal and lumber railroad that ran a dilapidated old emigrant car at the rear of a long freight train out to the Junction and back each day, took you through a sec-

tion that had in it little to commend. To be sure, since Cameron settled there, he had succeeded in ridding the neighborhood of some of its most objectionable features. He spurred the farmers on to improve the road leading to the railroad; he was instrumental in establishing a school, which was in session long terms each fall and spring; he formed a church society, and every two weeks a minister came to them and held services; he led in starting a series of neighborhood parties in winter and picnics in summer, into which he introduced some admirable literary features and easy study. Cameron lifted his neighborhood out of the tangle of hemlock brush, briars, wild grape-vines and scrub oak, and clothed it with something approaching a fair degree of enterprise and progress. By the very force of example, he inspired industry, thrift, and a desire for better things; while by advice and suggestion, modestly and unobtrusively given, he was able to guide the poor derelicts about him into smoother sailing.

So, when the great change came, when the money was pouring in upon this land and companies were ready to pay what seemed to be fabulous prices for every acre within the known oil-belt; when men of standing in the business and professional world were almost imploring these ignorant backwoodsmen to permit the putting down of wells upon their holdings, with the promise of substantial royalties upon all that might be produced—the people of the Cameron

district were just a trifle better prepared to have the responsibility of sudden riches thrust upon them than were most of the residents of the upper oil regions.

And here developed a peculiarity which Cameron never was able to explain. Men who learned from him how best to crop their farms, where to market their surplus product, or how to make their labor count to greatest advantage, who sought his advice upon almost every conceivable step from setting a hen to renewing a mortgage, held aloof when fortune knocked at their doors, and drove their own bargains with the rival agents, or counted their own cash when it was paid into their hands. Never a one took Cameron into his confidence in these days, and had there not been sharp competition and strong bidding on the part of many companies, it is probable that few of the farmers would have realized more than beggarly prices for their lands. As it was, the agents often took advantage of the ignorance of the men and women with whom they dealt, and many rich pieces of oil territory went into the hands of the prospectors for a mere song. While the companies reaped their thousands, the dazed and helpless owners looked on in simple and pitiful amazement.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEWLY RICH.

CAMERON watched the approach of producing oil-wells with a feeling of sadness. Strange as it may appear, he experienced no happiness in contemplating the good fortune which befell his neighbors, right and left. He did not believe that they would live better lives or come to more peaceful deathbeds through the riches thus suddenly thrust upon them, and which they would not know how to employ for the good of themselves and others.

"They are like children," he said to Alice, when they were talking over the new conditions, "and when they get their money will go out into the world with the determination to dazzle others with the glare of their worldly means. Industry will be stifled in their sons, and their daughters will become mere silly hangers-on after fashion. They will keep reaching out for luxuries and amusements, which never can form any solid foundation for true contentment and happiness. In this race they foolishly will throw away what has come to them without labor, and when

stripped of their gold will be in a more unhappy state than they were before."

"But, Duncan, many of them have lived such hard, laborious lives. They surely are entitled to some rest and comfort," replied Mrs. Cameron.

"That is true, Alice, but, with the help of God, their condition was becoming more tolerable every year, and I doubt if in all the commonwealth there existed a happier community than this. If they should come by degrees to more affluent circumstances, there would be every reason to rejoice, for then it certainly would be good fortune for them. But when changed from penury to wealth, almost in a day, their heads will be turned with the prospects before them, and the riches that came with no effort will be preyed upon by every swindler with whom they come in contact."

At the same time, Cameron knew it would be futile to raise his voice against leasing or selling the lands all about him. It is not human nature to resist the opportunity to grasp a fortune when it is within one's easy reach. We may search the world almost in vain for men who do not gladly embrace riches, and though philosophers may teach that the possession of great treasure seldom brings the happiness anticipated, still we remember that poverty is a master whose lash is as merciless as the hand of death itself.

So, one by one, the Cameron Valley people leased

or sold their farms and went into the distant towns and cities with the avowed purpose of "getting into society and seeing the world." Their poor belongings often were deserted, or given to the families of laborers, who poured into the country to carry on the new industry. Sometimes they held auctions and sold their stock, but cases are not unknown where everything was abandoned to be picked up by whoever might come first upon the scene. Women who never had been able to count more than two gowns at any one time in their wardrobes, and those of poor and cheap stuffs, were soon rustling in silks and kept dressmakers constantly employed on new outfits. Men who last week plodded in clumsy cowhide boots, and who enjoyed the freedom of collarless shirts, blue or butternut jeans and patched jumpers, were this week squeezing their feet into patent leathers and endeavoring to become accustomed to collars and cuffs and to eat with their coats on at tables covered with linen.

Cameron found it necessary to make a business visit to Bradan, the nearest town of any considerable size, and to which the Tubbs family moved as soon as their property was sold. Having some time upon his hands, Cameron hunted up his old neighbors, whom he found in a hired house, which they had taken ready furnished until they could build for themselves. Though excellent taste and full comfort were displayed in the rooms, Mrs. Tubbs, whose best

piece of furniture three months before was a straight-backed wooden rocker, with one broken arm, at once began to apologize for what she termed their "shabby condition." Nor was she content to permit the matter to drop until she several times assured their guest that it was the best they could get in the town until their own new house should be completed and furnished with articles of her own choosing. She was very grand, was Mrs. Tubbs, with her wealth of skirts and tight bodice, which was brought together only through great exertion over ribs that heretofore had been unhampered. Her brand new rings and massive gold chain flashed and glittered as though proud to adorn one of so fine a mould, and her voice, once harsh and high-pitched when she called the cattle or scolded Tubbs and the children, was now by effort held in check—or, perchance, was smothered by the pressure of her corsets.

And Elizabeth Tubbs—formerly Betsey—was quite imposing in a big-flowered delaine with an enormous bustle and a long train, which she had not yet fully mastered and which sometimes tripped her as she walked. There were more rings and chains and bracelets on Elizabeth than Cameron previously had seen on any woman of her age; but he reflected that he was not a judge of what might be fashionable. Elizabeth easily picked up superior airs and she spoke loud and fast as though anxious to domi-

nate the conversation. She was in all respects quite the forward young woman.

And poor old Jim Tubbs, all shaven and shorn, until his picturesqueness was lost, looked like a whitened manikin in broad-checked trousers and vest, black cutaway coat, high collar, bright necktie, stiff cuffs with turquois buttons, patent leather shoes, and a high silk hat which he kept beside him on the floor. He sat bolt upright on the edge of his chair as though afraid of crushing the upholstery, and when spoken to turned toward the speaker as he might have done had the only joint in his body been at the hips. He was the personification of discomfort, and kept glancing uneasily toward the door, and then back at gorgeous Mrs. Tubbs and radiant Miss Tubbs, as though watching an opportunity to cut-and-run out into the fields, where he could find freedom.

Nearly all that Mrs. Tubbs or Elizabeth had to say was upon subjects which led up to the expenditure of money, or about people who had money, or how much pleasure they took in letting others know that they had money of their own. It was at that time in the history of our country when millionaires were not as plentiful as they are at present, and those who counted their assets above fifty or sixty thousand dollars were really people of great fortunes. It was not to be wondered at that simple Mrs. Tubbs and her simpler daughter were full of the belief—which is not yet wholly eradicated in mankind—that money

is the balm for all ills and the open sesame to every door leading to human satisfaction, and saw in the shimmer of their gold a light that outshone modesty, good breeding, education and culture.

"You ought to sell out, Mr. Cameron," declared Mrs. Tubbs. "You won't never git any more for your place than they'll pay for it now. Why, you'd be richer'n any of your old neighbors. If you hold on much longer maybe youns won't git any kind of a price."

"'Youns,' ma?" said Elizabeth.

Mrs. Tubbs looked annoyed and bit her lip, but made no reply.

"But I do not wish to sell, Mrs. Tubbs," replied Cameron. "I prefer to remain as I am."

"Well, men are a queer lot, anyway," she rejoined. "I sometimes think Tubbs d'ruther be back on that old farm than bein' here in town where there's some-thin' to see, an' where, if he's a mind to spunk up, he can be as high as any of them. Banker Lowe ain't got any more money than Tubbs, an' when he goes down the street everybody bows an' scrapes ter him as though he was a high mightiness; but Tubbs, he jest sort of slinks along as if apologizin' for wearin' clothes that cost sixty dollars a suit, and some of these folks that thinks they're so fine, snicker at the way he carries himself. They don't do it over me an' Bet—Elizabeth. We jest hold our heads up an' look

'em right square in the face an' let 'em know that we're independent."

Tubbs shivered, and settled himself further down in his collar, and shrunk visibly within his fine clothing.

Cameron remembered that there was a young man in the family whom he always had known as "Coon." However, he was too wise to inquire after the boy by that name, so he asked Elizabeth if her brother was at home.

"Aw, yes, I think so. Do you know, Mr. Cameron, Archibald has grown quite sporty since we moved to town, and has really become an example which his father might follow."

"I ain't a goin' to foller his example," said Mr. Tubbs, suddenly straightening up. "He drinks too much licker."

"Mr. Tubbs!" ejaculated his wife with emphasis. "Ain't I told you more'n once that all young gentlemen with money and with nothing to do but to amuse themselves, drink more or less?"

"Well, Coon drinks more; an' tain't no credit to him nor to no one to do it," shouted Tubbs, with some of his old-time vigor.

"I should think you'd be ashamed to call your only son by such a low, vulgar name," sobbed Mrs. Tubbs, with her handkerchief to her eyes.

"W'y, dum it! you gin him the name yerself w'en he was a little feller an' treed a coon one day jest

back of the house. But sense we've come to town, an' Coon's spendin' six or seven dollars a day buyin' drinks for bummers that jest swells his head to ketch his treats, you an' Betsey can't bear to hear him called anythin' but Archibald." And Tubbs jammed his silk hat down till it bent his ears forward, and stamped out of the room.

Cameron pleaded that it was nearly time for his train, and took his leave as best he might under the circumstances. At the gate he joined Mr. Tubbs.

"I'm going to walk with you to the deepo," said the old man, "for it heartens me up to see an old neighbor who ain't gone plum crazy. Dum it, I wish I was back in Cameron Valley. If you say the word, I'll go down an' work for you on the farm by the month."

"That would not do at all, Mr. Tubbs. You are a man of property now, and it is your privilege and duty to exercise a careful oversight in its expenditure, that you and the members of your family may take some comfort and accomplish some good through the use of this money that has come into your hands."

Tubbs shook his head mournfully. "It's jest like turnin' a cow or a hoss loose in a granery full of meal. The poor critters ain't got judgment enough to eat what's good for 'em, an' then stop till its time to eat again; but they keeps on stuffin' an' stuffin' till they swells up an' busts. W'y this money I've got

won't last many years at the rate we are spendin' it; but I can't make Susan, nor Betsey, nor that fool of a Coon see it. They've jest got their heads in the meal barrel an' are hoggin' away like an ornery old cow; an' bimby they'll bust. Cameron, I cal'calate we have spent about four thousan' dollars in two months, an' we ain't got a dum thing to show for it, 'cept clothes that ain't like nobody else's, an' jewelry that nobody else'd buy. Nor we ain't made society slip a cog neither."

"But you should put your money at interest in some safe investment, and limit yourselves to spending the income and no more. There surely are chances to loan it, or to place it where it will be earning something."

"Chances, Cameron, w'y they're swarmin' like bees. There's a slick feller hangin' around Betsey—courtin' her, mother thinks, but I don't—who knows where he could invest it an' double it every six months. He's showed me figgers, an' tables, an' plans all in print as how it could be done. Then there's a man named Wilcox that Susan brought home from a missionary meetin' to introduce to me, an' he knows where he could put thirty thousan' an' make fifty thousan' off'n it inside a year. He's a mighty smart man, too. He's told his plans to Susan half a dozen times, an' she says it's jest as sure as thunder in July to come out big an' loud. An' there's two men with a gold mine to start up. The gold's right almost on

top the ground, an' all that's waitin' is money to hire teams an' draw it outen the mountains, so it can be melted into twenty-dollar pieces. They showed me the map with a big red dot where the mine lays. An' patents, mor'n a dozen of 'em; an' city lots in the nicest places all laid out jest like posey beds; an' stock in forty companies with big gold seals on it, an' pictures an' fancy letters tellin' how much it is worth, while I can git it dum cheap. Some of it's goin' to double in price in a week or two. W'y, I can't begin to tell you the chances I've had to invest, Cameron."

"I fear many of them are swindles, Mr. Tubbs. You should be very cautious in making an investment, and if I were you I would not place a penny until I was sure as to the nature and reliability of the project. Why do you not secure the service of some lawyer of high character and good business reputation?"

"No; I don't want a lawyer. I'm goin' to give them their fling for a while an' see if they don't git sick of it. But they won't. I know that well enough. Some day, when a partic'lar smooth chap comes along an' makes love to Betsey till she's clean gone on him, an' gits Coon drunk as a driller every other day, an' makes Susan think he is jest the one who can take her right into society—then I'm goin' to invest, jest to see how quick it will go! All but two thousan,' Mr. Cameron. I've got that amount salted, an' when

t'other's gone, I'll buy a place with that where they ain't no oil, nor prospect of oil. If they want to go an' live on it with me, they can; an' if they want to stay in society, they can do that."

The old man stopped suddenly and caught Cameron by the arm. "My God! look there. I can't go any further, Cameron; good-by."

He wrung his companion's hand with a quick, nervous grasp, and then, turning, walked rapidly toward his home.

Just ahead of him Cameron saw a group of young men approaching, and a glance afforded an explanation for the sudden departure of Mr. Tubbs. The leading spirit in the party was Coon, who in a few weeks had changed from an awkward and plainly-clad countryman into a loud, swaggering, half-drunken, disgusting, leering "sport." Those accompanying him were of the same class, save that they were older in the ways in which Coon was being initiated, and he was paying for his inexperience.

"Who's the hayseed?" shouted one.

"The devil!" said Coon, looking with a dull stare, "it's Cameron. Hello, Scotchie, how much is punkins worth?"

"They're cheap in town, Coon, where so many young fellows carry them a-top their shoulders," replied Cameron with a smile.

"Coon! Coon!" laughed some of the young bloods. "That is what his dad calls him."

"Damn my dad!" Coon blurted with anger. "He's an old mossback, just like you."

"And I see that his son has become a gentleman of leisure, spending his time in the company of wits."

"Look a-here," said Coon with an oath. "I ain't agoin' to be insulted by no countryman. We don't stand such things in town." His hand went into his hip pocket and brought out a revolver which he began to flourish in an ugly manner.

Instantly sorry that he had made any reply to the young fellow, who had been drinking quite freely, Cameron stepped forward, caught the revolver from Coon's hand with a quick twist, and breaking open the barrel, slipped the cylinder from place and tossed it into a deep mudhole in the street. "There, my boy," he said, returning the useless weapon. "You go straight up the street and do not turn to look behind you until you reach home. If you are sober enough to remember this message, tell your father, who left me before I could say a word of farewell, that if he wants Duncan Cameron's help at any time, he knows where to find me. The rest of you go back," he said, turning to them. "It must be sorry lives that you lead to indulge in such poor sport as getting drunk a silly lad like this one."

Coon had seen Cameron thrash a couple of bullies in a lumber-camp one winter several years before,

and he held the Scotchman in wholesome fear. Without a word he followed the course that was pointed out for him. His companions slunk away and made no protest.

CHAPTER IV.**THE MARCH OF DEVELOPMENT.**

THE land upon all sides of the Cameron farm had been leased or purchased by the eager, anxious companies, and the invasion by the strange, rough army of developers was at its height. Thinking people of those days often wondered whence came the swaggering, bullying, drinking, carousing, profane men who poured into the oil-fields to build derricks, attend the drills, chop wood, fire the engines, lay pipe lines, erect tanks, haul oil or lumber, or to engage in the various occupations co-incident with the growing industry. It was all hard, dirty, perplexing work. Men who came to perform it slept in shanties or in old barns where they stabled their horses, or under wagons when dry ground could be found for them to lie upon. Sometimes they did not change their clothing for weeks, and they battled constantly against the elements—and the mud, and the rocks. They ate the coarsest food, for which they paid prices that were almost fabulous. They were in a constant maelstrom of hurry, and confusion, and excitement, where he who had the strongest lungs with which to shout his

oaths, or the brawniest fist with which to clear his way, made most rapid progress.

The quiet carpenter, who whistled at his bench in the clean shop in town as he drove his plane or saw upon well-seasoned lumber, became in a few days the hoarse-voiced, cursing rig builder, tugging with cracked and bleeding hands and aching back at water-soaked and mud-covered hemlock planks.

The blacksmith who was wont to exchange stories with the farmers as he leisurely fixed shoes upon their horses, or who had a pleasant chat with the tourist and his wife while making a few repairs upon their carriage, became the burly tool-dresser, who, for five dollars a day, faithfully swung a heavy sledge, sharpening or pointing massive drills which had been pounding holes two thousand feet down through the flinty rocks to the oil-bearing sands.

The young man from town who had tried many things and never just found himself, but who was accustomed to regular meals and clean beds, became the driller, all grimy with machine oil and the pasty detrius from the well, working each alternate four hours, night and day, ever at the same monotonous twisting of the drill stem. Or, when an accident occurred and the cable parted, fishing with all sorts of queer barbs fifteen hundred feet down at the bottom of the narrow hole for the tons of iron and steel which made up the lost set of tools—fishing, it may be for weeks without success, and then possibly

catching the drill stem and hauling away till the tools neared the surface, only to see the grip let go at the last moment, while the mass of iron would plunge back to the depths in the rock, and the fishing must be commenced again.

The young farmer took his horses from the mowing machine or plow, and, hitching them to the lumber wagon, turned their heads away from the comfortable farm and toward the oil regions to become the teamster who found occupation in hauling lumber, engines, coils of rope, tubing, coal and oil. For days and weeks he plodded wearily with his horses, knee-deep in the mud, sticking fast in pitch-holes, breaking down from contact against hidden rocks, fighting with teamsters whose way he blocked, or who found themselves hopelessly mired in some almost bottomless swale.

The distant village merchant heard from the men who were pouring their capital into the oil-fields, how towns were springing up in a week. Collecting a stock of coarse clothing and a few of the necessities of life, he hurried away to the scene of a promising "strike," and in a few days opened a store in a rough shanty, through the cracks of which the storm beat or the sun and wind penetrated. He soon learned that a staple article of commerce was whisky, and barrels of that liquid were brought in to be dealt out at all hours of the day or night in all kinds of

vessels and in such quantities as the purchaser demanded and for what he might be able to pay.

Boarding-houses—called by courtesy hotels, with high-sounding names—where forty men slept on rough plank bunks around the sides of one room, or in the center of the same room ate at equally primitive tables, upon which quantities of food were spread for their choosing, came into existence in an incredibly short time. Dance halls, in which tobacco smoke and the fumes of liquor mingled with the depraved jokes and profanity every hour of the seven days in a week, were as numerous as the saloons and gambling-hells which crowded thick and fast around the center in which the booming oil town took root.

Great roaring flames of natural gas sprang high in the air from the mouths of tubing that stretched away in all directions toward the wells, like slender serpents spitting forth a stream of living fire. And day or night these bellowing fires never were quenched so long as the gas supply lasted. Months or years might pass, but they flared or roared in wind or storm, or sent their bright flames high in the still air of an autumn noon or a summer night.

The stain of oil and its oppressive smell were everywhere, for the thick, black liquid often escaped in quantities and ran in streams down the hillsides.

The clanging of iron upon iron at the tool-dressers' forges, the throb of engines and their hissing steam, the pounding of the drills, the whirling of the bull-

wheels at the derricks, the rattling of cables as they shot through the blocks, the creaking of wagons and the shouts of men were never quiet, for so great was the haste to draw this hidden wealth from its reservoirs that night was turned into day, and rest came only when the field was exhausted.

Picture a sylvan glen through which coursed a generous stream with dark and hidden pools reaching back under overhanging banks—a favorite haunt for the trout fisherman. Tangled vines of wild grape and cucumber go wandering over fallen trees and hide decaying stumps, or hang in graceful festoons over the faint trails that lead along the steep banks or down beside the brook. Brush and bramble are all in confusion, clinging to outcropping rocks and pressing close upon the great trees which are ever lifting their branches up and up in search of light and air. Eight months later, see in the same spot a half-hundred derricks, whose thirsty engines drink from the trout brook, and beside some of which stand mammoth tanks into which black streams are pouring from the wells; while long wagon trains, laden with barrels of the liquid, go groaning over the rough roadway leading out to the station, meeting other wagons which come rattling back with empty barrels. The feverish haste of hundreds of toiling men is evident upon every side. A “boom town” has sprung into life, with shanty stores, hotels, saloons, an opera house, a mission church, a post-office and a popula-

tion of ten thousand souls. The tangled forest is cut away where necessary, leaving white stumps which are utilized for the corner posts of shanties or the foundation of derricks. The soft leaf mold is broken into ruts by the wheels of numerous wagons. Wreckage—they call it junk in the oil-fields—lies strewn wherever it fell the moment it became useless. Vice in its many forms came almost at the beginning of the strange metamorphosis, and flaunts itself with a freedom and blazonry that proves its popularity. Over the mountain there, pushing on with a rapidity that is almost marvellous, comes the narrow gauge railroad, while here up the valley they are laying a pipe line at the rate of a mile a day.

All these new conditions and people gathered like a storm around the Cameron farm. A "city" sprang up almost at the doorway of the Cameron homestead. The clang and clamor, the babel of excitement and strife and prodigious efforts crowded in upon this oasis like hot sands which threatened to overwhelm and blot it out forever. Strange men knocked at the doors of the house and demanded boarding-places. Women came with baskets and pails to purchase the produce of farm and dairy, or of orchard. Teamsters broke open the barn and stabled their horses when they chose, and then flung money and curses at the man who protested. Groups of workmen lawlessly pushed their way across the fields without thought or care for the damage they were causing to growing

crops of grain. The riff and rabble which attaches itself to every great movement was present, with its constant and almost unbearable annoyances.

But Duncan Cameron fought against it all. The blood of the Covenanters was in his veins, and opposition only strengthened his determination to cling to his own and not permit these gathering foes to dislodge him. Scores of times was he approached by those who sought to buy or lease his farm, for each well approaching his lines from north, east, south, or west, had been a better producer than the one behind it. The expert prospectors declared that Cameron's two hundred acres covered rich layers of the oil-bearing sands, and the prize was one for which they contended with spirit.

All these offers were refused, respectfully, but firmly. He did not want their money, as he was in no need; he loved his home and would protect it from trespass as best he might until this flood of destruction should pass.

Then, when they could not persuade this man to change his oft-repeated decision, when he could not be lured to yield by offers of money, his persecution began.

CHAPTER V.

AN INSTRUMENT OF PROVIDENCE.

THE Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company was now well started upon a career which has since been considered in financial circles as a marvel in the way of achievement. The tactics it adopted at that time were bold and entirely new, and were not greatly feared, but now are so common as to call for general complaint. Its far-seeing officers realized that they could be greatly aided in their operations if they would enter into political manipulation to a sufficient degree to control certain affairs in townships, municipalities, counties and States, and to the accomplishment of this end the directors gave their president full power to make such bargains with party managers as he should deem necessary for the welfare of the company—and, of course, the good of the State at large. This man was Henry Lanphere, a smooth-shaven, soft-speaking, pious fraud. Very few people knew President Lanphere other than as an eminently respectable member of the community. He was correct in all his habits, for he lived a life of moral rectitude that was almost severe in its routine.

His attendance at church was marked and regular, nor did his piety stop there, for Mr. Lanphere carried his Sunday air at all times, and appeared to be constantly pondering upon problems of how best he might aid his fellow man.

He spoke of the oil-industry as a gift from Providence, in the participation of which all should receive benefit under certain rules and restrictions.

"Nature," he said, "has stored vast reservoirs of a commodity that will be of benefit to all mankind, and its hiding-place has been disclosed at this special time because the world has reached a point in its career when Providence has decreed that a new gift shall be bestowed. The dissemination of this gift should be controlled by men who are working along philanthropic lines; hence, these same men should decide as to the size of the output. To this end, strife for new and greater territory must be discouraged, and while those who are working along new and independent lines may be permitted to use their money in prospecting by sinking 'wildcat' wells, the representatives of Providence must watch all such operations, and if there is a show of oil, they must proceed to secure title to all adjoining territory and hold it for future operations."

President Lanphere declared also that the market should be dominated by the men in whom Providence—the author of the gift—had confidence. It was entirely wrong for the independent producer to sell to

the independent refiner; or to permit the independent refiners to go into distant cities and sell to exporters, wholesalers or retailers.

"The general welfare of mankind," of which President Lanphere spoke constantly, "will be best conserved if a firm hand has full direction of the market."

In order to bring this about, the representatives must not only secure every refinery, but they must embrace the railroads to an extent that enabled them to secure rates for freighting oil which would permit of competition from no other source.

With infinite care Henry Lanphere selected the men whom he believed best fitted to aid him in this great philanthropic scheme, and when he had made his choice and the way was thus prepared, the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company was not slow in moving to carry out the designs of Providence, according to the views of its president.

One of the first things necessary was to acquire an interest in newspapers which had made their appearance in the growing young cities of the oil-country. These were needed to expound the doctrines of President Lanphere, by placing before the public such articles as would expand the ordinary intellect upon the benefits to be secured through centralization of the various branches of the industry. At the same time, a quiet, circumspect campaign must be carried on through all the Assembly districts of the State, that

men should be chosen who might be brought to thoroughly appreciate the beneficent intentions of the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company, and aid it through the enactment of such laws as time would prove to be necessary. While engaged in this missionary effort, attention also was to be given to the selection of judges who would construe the laws in various courts. It was thought wise in many instances to make certain judges and legislators stockholders of the company over which Mr. Lanphere presided, and blocks of stock were set aside for that purpose. The affairs of townships and boroughs also required attention at the hands of the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company, for even the officers of these small divisions would be helpful factors in furthering the designs of this grand organization.

At this particular time, there was great activity among practical men whose experience taught them that certain inventions were demanded to help accomplish the work of drilling to the oil-bearing sands, storing and transporting the oil, increasing the supply from wells, etc., and the keen president of the Cygnet saw the advantage to be gained by getting control of all the patents which promised to be of value, lest they be retained by impious hands. A separate branch of the company was created for this special purpose, and, though operating under a dis-

tinct charter, it was directed by Lanphere and was financed by those who were associated with him.

It consumed time to accomplish all of this, but not nearly so much as might be expected. Lanphere was a prodigious worker, and he had an abundance of money at his command. Step by step, the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company extended its sphere of influence over these various bodies, and through channels too numerous here to set forth, until its stockholders—the Representatives of Providence—might complacently look around them and see the perfect workings of a magnificent machine. No matter what might be desired, means were at hand through which the end could be accomplished.

The Cygnet Company saw and realized the value of the Cameron farm, and its agents were put to work, with instructions either to buy or to lease the property. In various guises they had been coming to Cameron for a year. Mrs. Fisher was one of them. President Lanphere thought that this woman who had leaped from penury to prosperity, an old neighbor of the Camerons, might be able to excite the cupidity of the owner of the place, or at least to sow the seeds of discontent with his wife or daughter. But Mrs. Fisher signally failed, as all others had failed, and the reports which were constantly borne to President Lanphere's ears were that the Scotchman remained obstinate and would neither sell nor lease.

"Give him his price," said Lanphere, "and get rid of him."

"He has no price, sir."

"What, no price, and living in this age of the world!"

"Yes, sir. He declares that he has no use for the money, and that it would be a curse to him."

"Has an attempt been made to approach him through his minister? Sometimes the clergy find it to their advantage to take an interest in such matters."

"Cameron Valley has no minister now, sir, since most of the natives left there. You know that several of his former neighbors have been called upon, but without success."

"H-m-m. We may have to squeeze him."

"But there appears to be no easy way to do that, sir. Cameron doesn't owe a penny, has about ten thousand dollars in the Bradan National Bank, and is making enough from his farm and stock to more than support his family every year."

"Has the title to his farm been looked up? Many of these Pennsylvania lands have back taxes against them, and we have found such claims to be advantageous to us in the past."

"Cameron's title is without a flaw. He has attended to that."

"We might take him into the company."

"He would not think of it, sir. Bullis, who knows

something of him, sounded him on that proposition. Bullis led up to the subject by saying that he thought of buying some Cygnet stock, and gave Cameron an idea of what it is doing in dividends. He told Cameron that a block of the stock could be secured for him, too, if he desired, but the fellow declared that he would have nothing to do with it. Bullis says that the Scotchman denounced the Cygnet in round terms."

"Denounced us, did he? What did he have to say?"

"Said it was a monopoly that would leave in its wake the wreck of every independent concern that dared attempt competition. That it was throttling individual effort, absorbing or crushing opposition, and by single control of the market, was putting millions that were practically stolen from the people into its treasury and the pockets of its stockholders."

President Lanphere listened with open-mouthed astonishment. "The poor, ignorant, misguided man!" he said, with a show of deep emotion. "He has heard some of this talk from those who refuse to see the great mission for the good of mankind upon which the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company has entered. It is to be regretted that a way is not provided to punish such slanderers, who go about poisoning the minds of uninformed men. I think I will see Mr. Cameron in person, and disabuse him of

those erroneous impressions. Please send Wheeler to me as you pass through the office."

The clerk bowed and left the room. As the door closed, the benevolent look that overspread President Lanphere's face during the interview, disappeared in a flash.

"Damn this Scotch meddler!" he ejaculated, striking his desk with his clenched fist. "I'll bring him to my terms if I have to wreck the Bradan bank to do it."

CHAPTER VI.

AN AGENT OF THE INSTRUMENT.

ELI WHEELER, a cat-like, soft-spoken man, entered the president's office and approached his chief with a deferential air. Wheeler was one of those men whose age is not easy to place at a guess, but he was probably about forty-five. He was tall, narrow-chested, and had shoulders that sloped sharply, like the roof of a Queen Anne cottage, into unusually long arms. His face was remarkable only for his shifting eyes, which were so constantly moving from one object to another that it was difficult to determine their color. He wore a luxuriant brown beard, after a mutton-chop fashion, and through this the long fingers of his restless hands were constantly combing. He was faultlessly clad, with one exception—his linen was dirty; as if to give character to the man who wore it. You made up your mind as soon as you saw Eli Wheeler that you did not like him, but when he spoke, you hesitated. There was a good deal of humility in his voice, and his tone smacked slightly of the professional exhorters, who were so

common forty years ago. Still it had an earnestness and convincing quality that surprised you when you looked at the man, and if you listened long you began to think that you possibly had misjudged Wheeler, and that there really was about him more of candor and truth than the first glance at his face led you to think. It was never what Eli Wheeler said that gave you even a fleeting thought in his favor, but the way he said it.

“Oh, Mr. Wheeler,” said President Lanphere, turning from his desk as the man approached, “sit down. I want to talk with you about this Cameron business. You know—ah, that is, I suppose you have heard that the owner of that undeveloped tract over Tuna way, refuses either to sell or to lease his property.”

“Something, something, Mr. Lanphere—I have heard just a little rumor; a rumor, as it were,” replied Wheeler, plunging deeply into his whiskers. “I have not attempted to find out anything about it, Mr. Lanphere, being engaged recently, as you may remember, upon another part of our grand work.”

“Yes, yes; to be sure. I have been looking over your report and must say that you have executed that commission quite to my satisfaction—quite to my satisfaction. There is no defect in the titles, Mr. Wheeler?”

“None whatever. They are flawless.”

“I see you state that you have purchased in your

name, as usual, and that you did not find it necessary to give a bond to keep the properties in operation. How was that?"

"A bond was suggested by the independents sometimes, but Judge Purser, who happened to be present always, said that such a suggestion was an insult to an honest inventor, who had come among them with the best of motives; and then they said no more about it."

"Judge Purser is an ornament to the bench," said the president devoutly. "How many refineries have you purchased in the last month, Mr. Wheeler?"

"This last purchase makes the seventh, Mr. Lanphere."

"And I hear you have shut them all up, Mr. Wheeler."

"Every one, sir, but temporarily, it is understood in oil circles. The truth is, I can't afford to operate them with refined oil at its present price, and may never open them again, sir. I am afraid that I have lost all that I invested in these enterprises, and with it the sums which independent purchasers advanced for stock in my refineries." And the snaky fingers twisted and twined through his beard with nervous twitches.

President Lanphere leaned back with a satisfied smile on his thin, hard lips. Then, glancing at Wheeler, he winked, slowly, solemnly and devoutly, as became a man at the head of a great beneficent in-

stitution. "Wheeler," he said, "you are a rare friend to the Cygnet, and through that to mankind at large. I have directed a substantial increase in your salary, which I hope you will not refuse, though of course I realize that your service is mainly prompted from philanthropic motives. Oh, no, it will not be any hardship, I assure you. The price of refined oil will advance about two dollars a barrel at the proper time, and as there is no possibility for an increase in the price of crude, the profit will be quite sufficient, quite sufficient, to handsomely reward those engaged with us in carrying out the designs of Providence. The closing of independent refineries makes this possibly—ah, I may say—almost a necessity. Refined oil has been selling too low, and people have fallen into the habit of using it too lavishly. It may be well to check this—ah, recklessness."

After this manner, these two master hands at dissembling sparred with each other several minutes, and when they had convinced the desks and chairs, the walls and the pictures which hung upon them, of their purpose, they returned to the subject of Duncan Cameron.

"I want you to go over with me to see this man Cameron to-morrow, Mr. Wheeler," said the Cygnet's president. "He is resisting the company, for his farm lies just where we want to put up considerable tankage and it is evidently good producing land. Beside that, he is talking heresy and stirring up sedi-

tion and giving comfort to the independents. The good of the work demands that he be got rid of—peaceably, if we can, but—ah, any other way, if he will not listen to reason.”

“I always feel so sorry for a poor man who won’t listen to reason, Mr. Lanphere,” said Wheeler, releasing his beard for the moment and bringing out his handkerchief. “Why, all the argument is on our side. The press”—and he told off one corner of the handkerchief—“recognizes the great benefit that will accrue to mankind by the fullest possible development of our plans. The brightest minds in the legislature of our Great Commonwealth”—and he released another corner—“stand ready to champion such measures as may be necessary for our unhampered progress. The courts”—and the third corner fluttered out—“have given the most liberal interpretation to statutes in our interests and have often exercised their discretion and wisdom to aid us in this progressive march. Capital”—and the handkerchief spread out upon his knees—“the men who have had the brains to accumulate money, the thinking, planning men of every community, endorse our position by standing ready to purchase every dollar’s worth of stock that goes upon the market. But some men close their eyes to evidence and turn deaf ears to argument”—and he folded the square of linen in half. “They are constantly striving to start rival companies”—another fold—“or to invoke the law!”—

again a fold. "As I think them over"—his bony hand seized the pad of linen and held it in a grip of steel—"I am reminded that all, as St. Paul said, have found it hard to kick against the pricks." And Wheeler tucked the handkerchief away in his pocket without again letting it see the light.

"Quite right, Mr. Wheeler, you are always quite clear and right in your reasoning. You may have time during the afternoon to make some inquiries of Hughes concerning the Cameron matter, and I will talk more with you to-morrow on the way over. We will go by the narrow gauge. Oh—yes, by the way, Mr. Wheeler, I heard up at Bradan that you have discovered a family that might be quite useful to you in your private enterprise. Let me see—the name, I think, is Stubbs."

"Just Tubbs, Mr. Lanphere; leave off the first S. I was about to tell you of them."

"Much cash?"

"Well, say forty thousand cash and a sixteenth royalty on ten good wells. Tubbs owned the tract just west of the Cameron farm and sold to that Forestville company which we closed out——"

"Absorbed, absorbed, Mr. Wheeler."

"——absorbed last fall," corrected Wheeler.

"H-m-m—large family?"

"No; only four."

"Tell me of them."

"Tubbs—old-fashioned, weak, a hen-pecked non-

entity; Mrs. Tubbs—vain, ignorant, crazy to get into society, silly, garrulous; daughter—handsome, ambitious, silly, but teachable; son—gambler, bummer, pickpocket, highwayman or anything you want him to be.”

“De-cidedly interesting. They are worth cultivating, Mr. Wheeler, especially as Tubbs and the boy might easily be got rid of—and you are a widower.”

Wheeler’s shifting eyes nearly closed as he looked for an instant into the face of his chief, but he made no reply.

CHAPTER VII.

A TEMPTATION EMBRACED.

It was approaching noon the next day when Eli Wheeler, driving a team attached to a light road wagon, drew up at the Cameron farm house, tied his horses to the fence, and sought the owner of the place. Cameron was at work in his garden and betrayed no desire to cease his labors for the purpose of talking with his visitor, whom he at once placed in the class of those who so constantly annoyed him with offers to buy or lease. It was evident that the last few months had been unpleasant ones for Cameron, as he had grown pale, thin and nervous, from his constant vigils to guard his possessions from trespass and destruction. Then, too, he had been compelled to do all the work upon the farm, for there were so many opportunities for young men to get employment on the neighboring wells at large pay, that he could secure none to engage in common farm drudgery. Mrs. Cameron and Agnes had long been convinced that he was wearing himself out in what appeared to them a vain attempt to keep the home he so

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deeply loved from falling into the hands of those whom he looked upon as vandals. Several times they pleaded with him to dispose of his holdings, and go away where they would neither hear of the oil-country nor be disturbed by its sights; but they soon saw that he grew suspicious even of them, and looked upon them as in league with some of the numerous agents who were constantly besieging him. So they abandoned the attempt, and set cheerfully to work to give him every possible aid.

Wheeler put forth his most consummate arts to engage Cameron in conversation, and though he received half-civil replies from the Scotchman, he made little progress and was nearly at his wit's end when Cameron turned suddenly upon him.

"See here, sir," he said, "you are not present to talk upon the prospects for crops, nor to compliment me upon my garden or the growth of my meadows, which I can get no man to help me harvest. Out with your business and have done with it."

"Well, you see, Mr. Cameron, I am Eli Wheeler, the man who is trying to establish a chain of independent refineries with which to fight the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company. No doubt you have heard something of me?"

"Aye, a bit."

"I have watched from afar your fight to hold this property from the Cygnet Company and have prayed night and day that you might hold on till I could

complete some other moves in my great plan and come here to see you. I believe, Mr. Cameron, that Providence has inspired your noble contest. It has been in my mind that you were raised up as an instrument to further and aid the struggle the independents are making against this grasping and never-satisfied monopoly. This thought has comforted me as in my own humble way I have pushed on in the work in which I have enlisted, and when discouraged and disheartened by the obstacles which have been thrown in my path, when tempted sometimes to give up all I have accomplished, and see my hopes dashed to the ground, I have turned my eyes in this direction and received new strength and inspiration from seeing that a contest equally as brave was being carried on by Duncan Cameron."

Cameron rested his folded arms on the top of the handle of his hoe and looked straight across them at the man who was speaking. Wheeler's face was a study. His eyes were as steady now as the light of a planet, for he sighted his game and could not be diverted. He appeared like a man who had at heart a great mission, which urged him on and on against obstacles that hurled themselves into his pathway from every side. His earnestness gave him that look which comes into the face of the kindly humanitarian, and in his voice and manner of speaking there was the ring of true courage. Not once did his long forefingers pursue their favorite chase through his beard,

for they were clenched to hold them back, as though grasping the shoulders of the monster with which he was making his sham-fight.

"Let me say to you, Mr. Cameron, that the knowledge of what you have done is not confined to this locality. In the lower district, where I have been at work securing seven refineries, all of which are in successful operation, men know what you are doing here and are hoping that you will not surrender. Hundreds of them would feel it an honor to grasp your hand and thank you for your bravery."

"I am entitled to no credit for my action," said Cameron quietly, "for it has been a selfish fight on my part and was carried on merely that I might retain my farm."

"But the example, Mr. Cameron, the example has been helpful to the oppressed producers in every corner of the oil-fields. I cannot look upon it as in the least selfish on your part. You have been standing here like a rock, holding impregnable a position that to-day can be taken advantage of if you desire and thus make it possible to deal this band of gentlemanly robbers the hardest blow they have ever received."

"What is your plan, Mr. Wheeler?"

O, Duncan Cameron, Duncan Cameron! did no echo of the warning you spoke to simple old Jim Tubbs come to your ears? Did not the prudence and caution of your forefathers wave the danger signal before your eyes?

"It is this, Mr. Cameron," replied Wheeler, without betraying the least satisfaction. "If I understand the situation correctly, you own two hundred acres here which the Cygnet Company cannot buy?"

"That is true."

"And there are still within easy reach of, or adjoining your place several independent tracts upon which the Cygnet has not laid hands?"

"Yes, sir—twenty good producing wells, from which the Cygnet refuses to take the oil to its refineries or to give the owners tankage. But the owners are becoming discouraged, for their money is in the ground, and they are on the eve of selling out."

"Then there is no time to lose and they must be encouraged to hold on," replied Wheeler in assumed alarm. "That being the case, Mr. Cameron, my plan is to establish here on this spot an independent refinery that will not only take care of the oil from the twenty independent wells of which you have spoken, but which will also refine the product of every well that can be drilled upon your two hundred acres!"

Cameron's eyes were dimmed with a mist that sprang to them, and through the swimming tears he saw the smoking stills, the rows of reeking barrels, the groaning derricks, the rum-shops, and shanties, and striving men, and disorder, where now lay peaceful meadows, an orchard bursting into perfection, and rolling pastures in which were grazing the animals he loved.

"It is a bold project," continued Wheeler, speaking partly to himself and clasping his hands as if to calm his excitement. "If we can launch it without our intentions becoming known, it will be a blow that will stagger the Cygnet to its knees, and all over the oil-country the independents will take heart and rally to the final struggle that will set them free." And then baring his head and turning his face heavenward, he appeared to murmur under breath a prayer for guidance.

"Your pardon, Mr. Cameron," he continued, "but I feel so deeply in this matter and see so vividly how much there is at stake, that often I am quite beside myself. Oh, if you knew, as I do, how this slimy monster is reaching out like a mighty octopus, embracing within its grasp every factor with which it may further its ends, you would not wonder at my emotion, but would marvel how men can submit to the forging of chains upon their hands."

"I know enough of the Cygnet and its methods to convince me that it is the instrument of the devil, sir," said Cameron; "and I believe it is my duty to join you in your noble fight against it."

"Thank you, Mr. Cameron, thank you!" exclaimed Wheeler, seizing both of Duncan's hands. "I cannot express what is in my heart. Forgive my weakness." Tears coursed down the man's cheeks and his voice was broken by sobs. After a time Wheeler regained his composure, and then he proceeded: "Your

name will be honored for this, Mr. Cameron, in ten thousand homes, for it is one of the noblest acts in the history of this great struggle. I know the sacrifice is a heavy one; but you will not lose by it, for the consciousness of having done something to aid one's fellowmen is the greatest compensation that can come to one. Nor will there be any money loss, for we cannot fail. The B., B. & K narrow gauge is now within three miles of this spot, and when completed will pass but half-a-mile below, as the projectors have assured me. The Cygnet cannot cut us off from the market, and with public opinion on our side our success is assured."

An hour later, Wheeler entered his wagon and drove away. There was in his manner no trace of exultation nor had one word passed his lips or a glance escaped his eyes that betrayed in the slightest the game he had played. By slow degrees he unfolded his plan, leading Cameron on, step by step, and often leaving his victim to make suggestions which he adopted or from which he steered adroitly away as might be necessary for his purpose. In brief, his plan was as follows: They would become principal stockholders in a company to be known as the Cameron Farm Company, capitalized at one hundred and thirty thousand dollars. Cameron was to put in the farm at fifty thousand dollars, "which is nothing near what it is worth," said Wheeler, "but it will be impossible for me to raise more than sixty-five thou-

sand dollars on short notice without greater sacrifice than I dare make, or without exciting suspicion, and we must move with the utmost secrecy, you know." However, Wheeler proposed to give Cameron a writing to the effect that when the production from the wells which might be drilled on the tract, or the proceeds from sections they might lease, reached a certain amount, the overplus should be paid to Cameron for his greater interest. There was to Cameron's credit approximately ten thousand dollars in the Bradan bank, and this with the four thousand dollars he expected to raise from the sale of his stock, was to make up his share. Wheeler would deposit to the credit of the company within ten days his share in cash. By that time the incorporation papers could be prepared and the stock be issued.

"There is but one lawyer anywhere in the State whom we can trust to draw our papers and not breathe a word of our intentions to the Cygnet people," said Wheeler, "and that is Judge Purser of Clarion County. The Cygnet has pretty nearly all of them in its pay, and so I think it will be best to send for him. He has done all of my business, so far, and is deeply interested in the work. I can recommend him as a noble-minded jurist, and if you have none to suggest, I will telegraph him to-night to come on."

"Certainly," said Cameron. "I know none of them and will leave the selection to you."

"I have thought this out with great care, Mr. Cameron," continued Wheeler, "and you will notice by running over the figures that we still have one thousand dollars stock unprovided for. This I would propose to give to Judge Purser for his services, in addition to the expenses of his trip. He is a man of great influence among the independents, and has done so much for their cause that he is identified with them in all things. His name as one of our stockholders would be a powerful factor in our favor when we begin operations—and I assure you, Mr. Cameron, we will need his experience, counsel and legal knowledge before we are through with this struggle."

So Wheeler took his leave, with the understanding that he would return the third day after and bring Judge Purser with him, for the whole business could be transacted there at the farm-house, where inquisitive persons might not pry upon their deliberations and reveal the nature of the proposed enterprise to their enemies.

He sat half-bowed in his wagon, like a man upon whose shoulders rests the weight of a tremendous task. He passed a bend in the road, but his manner did not change and he looked straight ahead of him and held the reins in a listless manner. Another bend led him through a bit of woods, and then on over a sharp hill. He was a mile and a half from the Cameron farm when he straightened up

and cast a quick glance behind him. There was no longer need for control, and in an instant Eli Wheeler became himself. Writhing and wriggling in the seat, thrusting his long legs out over the wagon box and drawing them back again, chuckling to himself in much the same manner that a dog growls and mutters as it gnaws at the bone it has wrested from the companion of its kennel, his eyes shifting and squinting as though to make up for lost time, the unscrupulous tool of the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company went on his way.

Just before the train was due at the station, Wheeler left the hotel where he had procured his team and eaten his dinner. Lanphere was pacing slowly up and down the platform, but they apparently did not recognize each other. When they were crowding into the coach, Wheeler was close beside his chief, who turned and spoke one word of inquiry:

“Hooked?”

“Sure as hell,” replied Wheeler in an undertone.

A young man in the throng of passengers on the platform heard the inquiry and reply and thought it a strange salutation to pass between President Henry Lanphere and an apparent stranger. A long time afterward he remembered the occurrence to advantage.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WARNING UNHEEDED.

CAMERON remained standing in the road where they had been talking until Wheeler disappeared from sight. He was wondering how his wife and daughter would look upon this change of purpose, for no longer ago than when they were seated at the breakfast table he had brought the subject up—as he did on every possible occasion of late—and reiterated for at least the thousandth time his determination to hang on.

Mrs. Cameron, however, gave him little leisure to think it over, for she had noted from the house her husband's long conference with the visitor and their very cordial farewells. Scarcely had Wheeler driven around the first bend in the road, before she stepped into the yard, filled with its pretty flower beds and well-kept shrubbery, seeking her husband. She was a comely, bright-faced woman, who happily retained the beauty of her girlhood to mingle with the riper bloom of maturer years. There was, in these latter weeks, a trace of anxiety in her

countenance, half-saddening her smile and touching her eyes with a tinge of sorrow or of unknown fear. However, she did not permit this slight apprehension to mar her wholesome heartiness and uniform good spirits, for Alice Cameron was not the kind of woman to borrow from the future any trouble it might have in store.

"Who was your visitor, Duncan?" she called to her husband. "Another land speculator?"

"No, Alice—no, and yes," he replied, as he approached the gate. "His name is Eli Wheeler."

"It is not familiar," said Mrs. Cameron, after a moment's thought, in which her mind dwelt more upon her husband's manner than upon Wheeler's identity. "Nor is his face one that I recall."

"No, he is a stranger to you, Alice, but I have heard much about his work in buying up the independent refineries in the lower country. However, you are likely to know more of him in the future, for I have entered into partnership with him."

"Duncan—Duncan Cameron!" she exclaimed, catching him by the arm and peering into his face. "Are you daft, man, or are you trying the effect of a little joke?"

"No, Alice, I do not think I am daft, though I may not be so good a judge of that as others. Let us walk along to the spring and I will tell you the whole plan; but this you must remember, that for the present no word of it must be told, even to Agnes."

"Why, Duncan, since these terrible people have surrounded us, neither Agnes nor myself see anybody to whom anything could be told. We have no confidants here, except yourself and Don."

"I know—I know. But, Alice, it shall not be so a great time longer. We—that is, you and Agnes, are very soon to leave here. I remain to see that which I have endeavored to bring to perfection torn and marred by all the hideous details of oil development."

Thunderstruck at his words and alarmed by his manner, Mrs. Cameron took her husband's arm and they sauntered slowly to the spring. On the way, Cameron gave her the full details of the agreement into which he had entered with Wheeler. They were seated on the bank from which the clear, cold stream of splendid water flowed, and Mrs. Cameron looked steadfastly into the limpid pools as though endeavoring to read therein what the future might hold for this suddenly accepted venture.

"Duncan," she said at length. "What do you know of this man? Has an hour's acquaintance convinced you that he is honest, and that it will be entirely safe to risk all you have in this endeavor?"

"Personally, I know nothing of Wheeler except what I have observed to-day. Some of the papers, and some producers whom I have met told about his great achievements in purchasing a number of refineries in the lower country and keep-

ing them open for the benefit of the struggling independents. Very many believe that through Eli Wheeler and those who unite with him will come the only competition that may be expected to break the increasing power of this accursed monopoly. Hundreds of men—nay, thousands—have trusted him and have joined with him by placing their money in his hands, and I see no reason, Alice, why I should doubt him.”

“This may be true, as you say, Duncan, for I have heard little of the business and know scarcely anything of what is beyond us. But you are tired, my dear husband, with the long effort you have so nobly sustained to keep your own home and resist the trespasses of the lawless men who press us on all sides. Lad,” and she turned to him gently and placed her hand on his shoulders, “it would please me best, as I think it would be better by far for you, if you should sell the Cameron farm and have done with it all.”

“I cannot do it, Alice,” he replied, half-impatiently. “I have passed my word to the contrary so many times that to depart from the position I have taken would look like cowardice or defeat. Besides, I have agreed with Wheeler.”

“But no papers have been drawn and signed.”

He smiled as he turned to her. “A Cameron’s word does not need writings and bonds to enforce it,” he replied. “Eli Wheeler left here with my promise,

and when he returns he will find me ready to keep it."

"Forgive me, Duncan; I will say no more," and she took both his hard, calloused hands within her own. "It is my love for you and my anxiety to see you happy that has prompted me in my protests. And, Duncan, whatever comes of it, we still will have each other and Agnes."

"Yes, lass—and the memory of the happy years we have spent here, coupled with the hope that more like them will come—but it cannot be here in the spot we love."

In the afternoon Cameron wrote to an acquaintance a few miles across the line in New York State and offered to sell his horses and entire herd of grade Durhams. He made no explanation other than to say that conditions were such that he found it difficult to secure farm help and he had decided to go out of the stock business. He knew if his correspondent purchased his animals that they would be in good hands, and therefore he was disposed to make the price reasonable if the sale could be made at once. He went to the station to post his letter. As he was about returning home he was met by Sam Edgert, who had taken a portion of the money he got for his farm in the Cameron district and realized the dream of his life by investing it in a hotel at the station. Edgert proved a model landlord. He had the most pretentious hotel in that vicinity and was so proud of his

accomplishment that he tolerated the presence of only those guests who conducted themselves with decorum. The result was that the Edgert House became headquarters for the capitalists, land speculators, agents and better class of visitors for a wide section.

"I'm not letting my women folks or my boys make a jack-rabbit out of me, like Tubbs is," he was wont to say to some of his old acquaintances. "The oldest girl and both boys is to school over in York State, and they don't get only board and twenty-five cents a week for spending money. And I'm going to keep 'em there. The two youngest girls are home with their mother and go to school every day, just the same's if their dad didn't have a copper. Mrs. Edgert, she's the landlady, and if I do say it, you never see a woman that knows what's going on in her house better'n she does in this one. She keeps every room in it as spick as a parlor, and the man who don't wash the oil and black off his hands and face, and comb his hair, don't set down to a meal in her dining-room."

After greetings with Cameron, and a pressing invitation to come in and take supper—which Duncan declined on the plea that he must hurry home as he was now both proprietor and hired man—Edgert, who never lost an opportunity to make known the popularity of his hostelry, said:

"You can't guess who took dinner at the Edgert today, Mr. Cameron."

"No? Well, suppose as a guess I should say President Lanphere of the Cygnet?"

"Thunder! Cameron; how did you know?"

"I didn't know," said Cameron with a laugh, "but guessed it. The reputation of the Edgert has become so wide that I should not be surprised to hear that the head of the great oil and refinery monopoly came here to take a meal and decide whether your hotel was anything he needed in his campaign of greed and grab."

Edgert looked at him in open-mouthed astonishment. "That's just what he did, Cameron, sure's a gun. He came in on the 9:16, walked over to the Edgert and said he wanted a room, and when he registered you can bet I give him the best we had. Then he said he might want a team after dinner to drive out a few miles. I told him there was only one team in and it might be let any minute. 'I shall expect it to be ready for me, Mr. Edgert,' he said, 'if I want it. You may charge me for the day.' He's such a dum keen, sharp, bossy-looking chap, that I nodded my head and didn't say a word. Couldn't see into him half an inch, even when his mouth was open. Well, he stayed in his room most of the time, writing; but finally he came down and sat in the bar-room, and when he got a chance, he asked a lot of questions about you."

"About me, Edgert? What did Lanphere want to know about me?"

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"Better ask what he didn't want to know," replied the hotel-keeper. "He didn't get much out of me, though. I said you was a square-toed, opinionated Scotchman, and had notions of right and wrong and took after the right every time. Along about noon another man that came in on the same train and hired a team to go out and look at some wells on my old place, drove back and asked what time the first train left. When he went in to dinner, Lanphere stepped up and said he had changed his mind and I could leave the horses in the stable. But he paid me for them when he settled his bill."

"Describe the other man, Edgert. Possibly I know him," said Cameron.

"An ornery, sneaking, missionary-looking cuss, with mutton-leg whiskers that he keeps fishing around in all the time with his fingers. His eyes, too, moving as though he expected someone to jump out at him from the floor, ceiling, or wall, but when he talks it sounds jest like he was preachin'."

"Did he register at the hotel?"

"No; when he went out he was in a hurry, and when he come back I guess he forgot it."

"Did Lanphere appear to know him?"

"Never looked his way, Cameron; but I thought it odd that Lanphere made up his mind that he wouldn't use the team about as soon as he heard the other fellow inquire what time the train left."

"Possibly only a coincidence," said Cameron,

though the thought came to him that President Lanphere may have been shadowing Eli Wheeler and that Wheeler's plans to add the Cameron farm to the great opposition forces against the Cygnet might be forestalled. Not a suspicion of collusion crossed his mind, nor yet did the faintest echo of the warning he had given old Tubbs come to his ears.

"Oh, I forgot," said Edgert, after they had said good-by. "Harry was home from school yesterday and went back this afternoon, on the same train with Lanphere."

"Harry! I should have been pleased to see him," said Cameron. "Is he well?"

"Like a racer, and takin' hold of his books as steady as a professor. He's twenty-one next month, an' he's got more sense than his pap, who's over fifty."

Cameron laughed.

"He inquired all about you," continued Edgert, "and was particular to be remembered to Miss Agnes."

"Thank you; it will please her to have a message from an old school-fellow. What are you going to make out of him?"

"I ain't going to make anything out of him," replied the elder man. "He's going to make his own way, and you gave him the start when you got him to come to your house to evening classes and lent him books. In the two years since I sold the farm,

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Harry's trotted square up the course, and nobody can hold him back. I have my doubts about some of the others, 'cause they ain't got the gait, but Harry's going to cross the tape a winner."

"Success to him!" said Cameron, and with another good-by he drove away thinking that possibly he had been wrong in holding that the coming of sudden wealth was a curse to all those who were its recipients.

CHAPTER IX.**A TOTAL SURRENDER.**

THE second day afterward, Cameron sold his stock to the dealer to whom he had written, and who came immediately on receipt of the letter. It was a grand herd of beautiful creatures, and they were started away in a drove just at break of light on the day Wheeler had named for his return. Cameron could not look upon their departure. He slept little during the night, and before daylight arose and hurried through the orchard and buried himself in the wood lot. He did not return until long after he knew the men had gone with his pets, and he went into the house without casting a glance at the pasture or the lane. He insisted also upon the sale of his horses, exacting a promise that the team should not be resold to anyone who would return it to the oil-country. The price was made by the purchaser, for Cameron said he could not ascribe a value to his dumb friends.

That Mrs. Cameron and Alice had been crying, was evident to him when he came to the house, though they choked back their tears in the attempt to appear

cheerful. The family devotions which Duncan invariably conducted were saddened with the thought that they had turned from their shelter and care the creatures that had served them so faithfully. Of all, only the collie was left, and he pushed his way into the half-open door and looked up into his master's face and whined pitifully.

"No, Don, old fellow, we'll keep you," sobbed Agnes as she threw her arm around the collie's neck and buried her face in his shaggy coat.

No one tasted the breakfast, and they spoke only of the most commonplace things—the prospect of rain, the coming of new rosebuds, the twittering of swallows in the chimney. After a time Cameron went to his bookcase, on the shelf of which he had told the purchaser to leave the check for his stock in such amount as he could afford to give. He picked up the slip of paper and read the figures—five thousand, seven hundred dollars. Surely the man had dealt honorably, but Cameron would have torn the paper to bits and given another in its place for an equal amount if he could have gone to the door and looked upon the sight which gladdened his heart that day when Mrs. Fisher endeavored to persuade him to lease or sell his farm. He felt that he was loosing his moorings, and feared that if he should go out of the house and look about his premises again he would not have strength to resist a desire, that was now almost in complete control, to say to Wheeler when he

should come that he had reconsidered his agreement and must ask to be released from his promise. So he sat among his books, looking vacantly at their backs, and not realizing the titles, which he read over and over again.

Toward noon Wheeler came, accompanied by Judge Purser, a middle-aged, pompous, loud-speaking man, with the smell of liquor in his breath. Purser was one of those creatures who win preferment in country places by the display of those brazen qualities of bombast that often are mistaken for statesmanship. He could talk longer and say less upon a given subject than any man in his district, but his cheap clap-trap and spread-eagle speeches passed for oratory among voters, and so he won place. He was shrewd and unprincipled, greedy for wealth, and covetous to a marked degree; hence he never hesitated to secretly lend his office to those who were planning for the overthrow of individual liberty of men engaged in the production and sale of oil. Long ago Lanphere picked him out for just such purposes as the one in which he was now engaged, but as the ends aimed at could best be secured if the alliance were kept secret, Purser posed as a friend of the independents, and with trembling voice and assumed indignation he discoursed before admiring crowds upon the wickedness that was being practiced, and told of the "sharp turn on the thumbs" he would give the

monopolists if they were ever brought before his bench.

Wheeler and this lawyer were ushered into the sitting-room by Mrs. Cameron. Wheeler was steady of eye now and his hands were outstretched in friendly greeting. If possible he wore an air of deeper responsibility and of graver appreciation of all that rested upon his shoulders than on the occasion of his previous visit.

"I have scarcely slept since I was here, Mr. Cameron," he said, after he had presented Purser, "and I have been on the move constantly, making the arrangements to bring our enterprise to a conclusion, so far as the preliminary steps are concerned, to-day. I have succeeded, and my share of the capital stock is in bank, as I will show you by certified check in due time. As you know, it has been necessary to move with caution, but that has not swerved me from pushing ahead so that there may be no failure in this grand project in which we are to engage. Judge Purser came yesterday morning and at once set to work to draw all the necessary papers. He did not complete his work until nearly daylight this morning, but, thank Heaven, all is ready."

"Yes, sir," said Purser, "when I received the telegram I dropped everything and started at once. Sir, if I had been holding a term of court I would have found an excuse for an adjournment that I might answer this summons. High as are the several duties

of a jurist, I consider, sir, that there are calls which will sometimes permit of a laying down of the judicial ermine. When I see struggling thousands reaching out their hands in supplication for help to rid themselves of this insatiable monster which is slowly but surely wrapping its folds around the industrial prosperity of so many of the law-abiding citizens of this great commonwealth of Pennsylvania; when I behold, sir, the apathy and unconcern with which our leaders in government and eminent men in my own profession view this heart-rending situation, and, I may say, metaphorically, trun their eyes from the impending avalanche which threatens to sweep so many fortunes into a maelstrom of disorder—I feel, sir, that it is my first and greater duty to come to the aid of every heroic struggler who is endeavoring to stem the threatening waves and hold back the damning flood that endangers the very existence of our ship of state.”

Had Cameron been himself, he would have detected the fraud in Purser before it was too late, for no man was quicker to see through a sham than Duncan Cameron ere he was worn to the verge of collapse by the months spent in withstanding the onslaught which was made upon him. As it was, he looked at the speaker with mere curiosity, wondering why those strangely mixed metaphors did not come clearly to his mind.

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"I think you are right, sir," said Cameron. "Indeed, I think you are right."

"Right?" said Purser, with rising inflection, "I know I am right, Mr. Cameron, and I know that Mr. Wheeler is right, and I know that you are right. No man in all this broad country of ours has a higher appreciation of the judicial functions than rests within my breast. It was born with me, sir. From my earliest childhood I have looked upon the courts of our land as exemplifying to the fullest extent my ideal of all that was great, and good, and—I say it, sir, with the deepest reverence—holy. I have never lost sight of this oasis as a practicing attorney, and when I was elevated to the bench it became my constant guide-star, my invariable precept. 'Judge Purser', I say when a proposition is presented to me, 'think well upon this. Will such action soil the judicial ermine; will it bring the cold breath of calumny against the bench; is it a carrying out by man of the laws of the All Wise?' Then I hold the balance there before me and watch the trembling of the points. I do not take to myself any virtues, Mr. Cameron, which I do not possess, for no man in this Commonwealth can ever say that Judge Purser ever knowingly and wilfully committed an act to bring discredit upon the honor and uprightness of the court over which he presides. I may have erred in judgment, Mr. Cameron, for man is fallible, but at all

times I have striven to maintain an even balance of justice to all."

While he was talking, Purser took from his pockets a large number of formidably-appearing legal documents which had been prepared for the occasion under the direction of Lanphere and Wheeler. In this preparation Purser took little part, for he would not have been equal to the task. He was brought into the case merely for the moral effect his name might have, and to see that the papers were properly signed and acknowledged.

"Mr. Wheeler," said Purser, "it is necessary that we have two witnesses. Where can they be procured?"

Wheeler thought he could find some men at the wells further on, and so he hastened away with the wagon for that purpose. Scarcely realizing what he heard, for his thoughts were far away and not upon the words spoken with so much flourish and pomposity by Purser, Cameron listened to the reading of the deed which conveyed his farm to the Cameron Farm Company. The articles of incorporation were next produced, and Purser read them in sonorous tones that filled the little sitting-room and evidently gave him the highest satisfaction. Occasionally he paused and proceeded to explain passages in the legal phraesology, which he feared might not be understood, but his vague and involved dissertations left his listeners more completely in the dark than they had

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been before he commenced, and it was with some relief that they saw him turn to the closely-written folios.

In time it was over. Alice tremblingly affixed her name below that of her husband's on the deed, the acknowledgments to the documents were taken, and two rig-builders whom Wheeler brought scrawled their names as witnesses. Just what he had executed, Cameron did not know, but when the papers were folded and wrapped with tape and were put into Judge Purser's hands to be recorded, Duncan Cameron, the long-headed, far-seeing, cautious, educated, but unsuspecting farmer, who had been so ready with his advice and counsel to his neighbors, had surrendered himself to the power of Wheeler and was practically penniless. Among the papers which Judge Purser shuffled before Cameron, and which was not read, was one giving Eli Wheeler power of attorney to act for Duncan Cameron and the Cameron Farm Company in all its affairs, "freely and fully without further consent or authority of the said Duncan Cameron or of the several stockholders in the said company," and authorizing "the said Eli Wheeler to vote by proxy the shares in the said company now held and owned by the aforesaid Duncan Cameron."

But Judge Purser was a man of established honor, and Eli Wheeler was sacrificing so much in the struggle against oppression, that there surely was no reason to suspect them of fraud or of wrong-doing. They

were grave, serious men in appearance, and were so solicitous that every point should be covered to the entire satisfaction of Cameron, that no hint of their villainous game came to those with whom they dealt.

The documents were to be recorded at once, and on the following Monday Cameron was to meet Wheeler and Purser at Oleford, and the remaining steps would be taken in the formation of the company. With many good-bys, the men drove away, and Cameron sank into his chair before the broad shelf of his bookcase and buried his face in his hands. He attempted to go over the steps he had taken in this new enterprise, one by one, but they confused him and he found it was impossible. After a time he called his wife and daughter to him and they planned what they would do. Several weeks might elapse before active operations would be commenced upon the farm and it was decided that in the meantime Alice and Agnes should be installed in a modest way in a hired house in one of the distant towns. Duncan, who was to become the resident manager of the company, would not hear of their expressed desire to remain with him in the old home.

"It will not do, my dears," he said. "The house will be turned into an office and general headquarters for all the business. A large addition is to be built to the barn and that will become the refinery. In three months the rigs will cover our meadow and orchard, and all this babel of confusion which now surrounds

us at a distance will be renewed and added to with this as its center. I have kept you here too long, out of my selfish love for the home we have built up, and now you must go."

"Do not say that, Duncan," said Mrs. Cameron. "Since the death of my mother I have never seen a sadder day than this upon which we have decided to take this step. There has been no moment in which we have desired to exchange our home for the town. Is it not so, Agnes?"

"Yes, mother," replied the girl quickly. "And if we must go now I hope we have sense enough not to attempt to break into society after the manner of Mrs. Tubbs and Betsy."

Cameron smiled over the recollections of what he had seen and what he had since learned concerning the adventures Mrs. Tubbs was encountering in her efforts to dazzle Bradan.

"No, little girl, there is no fear of that," he said, as he kissed her, and some of his old light-heartedness came back to his face. "You shall live in Bradan, where you will have opportunity to continue your studies and improve your musical knowledge. I have no thought that your old schoolmate, Betsy—or Elizabeth, as you know she is now called—will ever recognize your presence in that place, and it is just as well if she doesn't. Indeed, if I find that you are accepting her as a pattern, I shall be tempted to

bring you back and put you in as mistress of the boarding-house."

"And what of Coon, father? Don't you remember how he used to haul me around on his sled and call me his girl?"

"He is now a poor scapegrace, Agnes, and your mother will have a care that he doesn't annoy you."

"There now, daddy, don't you worry about Coon Tubbs giving me any annoyance," said Agnes with a laugh. "You know I never could tolerate him as a schoolfellow, even if he did draw me in his hand-sled."

"Ah, yes, that is so," said Duncan with a twinkle. "It was Harry Edgert who was the favorite, wasn't it?"

Agnes, blushing, returned his jest with a declaration that she had no favorite but her cross old father; and so, laughing and talking about pleasanter things, they began to look for the brighter side of the change that had come into their lives.

CHAPTER X.

MR. TUBBS DECIDES TO INVEST.

MRS. CAMERON and Agnes were installed in a pleasant little house in Bradan. As anticipated, they did not receive visits from either Mrs. Tubbs or her daughter, but Mr. Tubbs came almost every day to their home and remained for hours.

"You needn't to mind me at all," he said to Mrs. Cameron one day soon after their removal to the town. "If you will only let me come in an' set down quietly by myself, I'll be happy. It does my heart good to see you at your work, Mis Cameron, an' to hear Agnes practicing at her music an' singing, an' to see that you don't try to set the fashions, or to follow what someone else sets. It must be mighty wearin' on a person to be all the time lookin' out to see that nobody gits ahead with some newfangle or other. I tried to tell Mis Tubbs one day that she was working harder since we had money an' she had a dozen dresses than she did when she done all her own housework an' helped me about the farm; but she got

histericky in a minnit, an' Betsy said I was cruel to bring up ma's past life in that way, an' so I quit."

They told him to come when he liked and to remain as long as he wished, and he took them at their word. Very often Mr. Tubbs made his way to a little porch which looked out upon a small backyard which he insisted upon caring for, and with Don, the collie, at his feet, Tubbs would smoke his pipe and talk to the dog for hours.

"These are about the happiest times me and you have, Don," they heard him say over and over again. "Of course, we'd like to be out fishin', and mebbly huntin', once in a while, but we'll come to that bimeby if we don't get too old. Me and you are just natchually cut out for country-fellers, ain't we? You don't like town cats, and fences, and boys that plug stones at ye; and I don't like style and bums. Queer about dogs, ain't it? They don't care a dum for style—just as leaves go around with a man what has got on baggy pants and an old coat, and who don't know the feeling of a biled shirt and collar, as to follow a struck-oil man who is prinked up in a seventy-dollar suit and a plug hat."

Sometimes Mr. Tubbs would take Don on a chain and they would go out through back streets and lanes into the fields, and there wander about till nearly dark, coming home at last all dusty, covered with burs and very tired, but both happy. And when the old man brought Don to the little yard, and with

many a caress bade the dog good-night, he turned toward his home without a smile, and with a heavy burden on his heart.

"What did you tell me was the name of Mr. Cameron's pardner?" he asked of Mrs. Cameron one day.

"Eli Wheeler, the independent refiner," she replied.

Mr. Tubbs started quickly. "I don't believe I ever heard that Wheeler was his pardner," he said. "Mebby you didn't tell me after all. If you did I should have remembered it."

"Do you know Mr. Wheeler?" asked Mrs. Cameron.

"Can't say as I do exactly," he replied. "I've seen him and heard a lot about him. Wheeler's a mighty smart one, and I've been watching his operations. I ain't a business man, Mis Cameron, as you know, and I've got to find some man to invest for me what money I've got left, where it'll be making more money. The Tubbs family can't live always on what we got for the farm. From what I've seen and heard, I guess that Wheeler's about the slickest timber in this woods, short of Lanphere himself."

"He comes to Bradan frequently on business," said Alice. "Why don't you try to meet him?"

"Does he ever come to the house here?" he asked.

"No, he has not called upon us since Duncan was here, about a fortnight ago. I suppose he is very busy, and as I know nothing of the affairs of the

company there is no occasion for him to call. He spends most of his time in the lower field, Duncan writes, where he is much occupied, and he only passes through here on his way back and forth from the farm. He has been purchasing the machinery for the refinery, and they expect it to reach the farm in a couple of weeks."

Mr. Tubb's little eyes squinted until they nearly closed, for while he was hearing things that opened his understanding he did not permit that knowledge to betray itself in his face. He happened to know that Wheeler had been in Bradan most of the time for the past three weeks, and that he had spent a good share of each day and night in paying court to Miss Elizabeth Tubbs.

"I don't want to pry into no secrets, Mis Cameron," said the old man after a time, "but if you will answer a question it may help me to decide about investing with Wheeler."

"Certainly, Mr. Tubbs, I will answer if possible. I know you too well to attribute to idle curiosity any interest you may show."

"No, it ain't because I'm curious, or because I want something to gossip about, but just because it's important for me to know. It is this—did Mr. Cameron invest all his pile with Wheeler?"

"Yes, Mr. Tubbs, everything he possessed, with the exception of a few hundred dollars, which have been placed in the bank in my name, and upon which I am

to draw to pay the ordinary bills until Duncan shall receive a regular salary from the company which they have formed."

"Who's the company?"

"Mr. Wheeler, who holds half the stock and is its president, Judge Purser, who holds a thousand dollars and is secretary and treasurer, and Duncan, who holds the balance of the stock and is the resident manager at the farm. No money is to be drawn for salaries until the machinery is delivered and ready for installation, or the actual drilling of wells has commenced."

"Thank you, Mis Cameron. You and Cameron have been my friends ever since I've known you," said Mr. Tubbs, rising to depart. "I won't make his affairs public, and what you have told me will be my secret. I'm more convinced than ever that Wheeler's got a great head for business."

On his way home Mr. Tubbs stopped in the little park and rested upon one of the benches. He appeared to be wholly absorbed in thought, and did not see Wheeler and Betsy strolling along one of the paths on the opposite side. The loud and unpleasant laugh of the girl drew his attention, and he looked at them a minute, his eyes narrowing with the peculiar squint that ever came when he was weighing some question of importance.

"I'll do it," he said, half-aloud. "Give the scamp rope enough and he'll be sure to hang himself."

And when those toward whom he looked had strolled upon their way, Mr. Tubbs went home with the determination to invest.

Meantime, on the Cameron farm the days were passing slowly enough. Duncan, with the assistance of several workmen, was engaged in changing the barn into a building that might be used for a refinery. Wheeler made two visits to the place, and once he wrote asking Duncan to meet him at the Junction, where they discussed plans and prospects during the two or three hours between trains. His report was that the retorts and other apparatus had been ordered, and though some delay might be experienced in the delivery on account of previous orders, he expected the arrival of the machinery soon—very soon. Then experts would come on from the refining districts of the west and the work would be hastened to the utmost. He exhibited specifications for the lumber for four complete derricks and the drilling machinery for four wells, all of which, he declared, was to come forward as early as the firms could reach the orders. On the occasion of each visit he renewed his stories about the progress of the independent refineries he had secured. They were having some difficulty in procuring oil to keep them going, he said, as the Cygnet Company was blocking them at every turn of the road; but his properties were gaining friends and even now had reached a point where they were pay-

ing expenses. He was driven almost to distraction by the details of a business that had to fight its way against such heavy odds and such active opposition. New problems were constantly arising and must be met on the instant, or the ground gained would be lost.

"In fact," declared Wheeler, when taking leave of Cameron at the Junction, "I would simply have to give up were it not for the help which Judge Purser gives me. He has thrown himself into this work with a singleness of purpose and a self-sacrifice that amounts almost to heroism. If we can hold our own against the enemy another month, we will have reached a point where we shall have more reinforcements than we can well accommodate, and then all our energies may be centered here, from which spot the final victorious charge shall be made."

Papers containing marked articles reached Cameron, and in these he read glowing accounts of the prospects for the independent refiners. In all particulars they confirmed what Wheeler said, and on the surface there was no cause for suspicion.

Soon after the transfer, Cameron visited each of the independent producers in that vicinity and gave to them some idea of the plan of the Cameron Farm Company, at the same time urging them to hold out against the demands of the Cygnet as long as possible. His disclosure was greeted with considerable enthusiasm and he received encouragement from all.

But as the weeks passed and these men did not see evidences of an early realization of the promises, they began to doubt. Among them was George Knox, and one afternoon he paid a visit to the Cameron farm for the purpose of finding out what had been done. Duncan went over the situation with Mr. Knox, as it had been told him by Wheeler, and renewed his plea that Knox hold out "just a few more weeks."

"To tell you the truth, Cameron," was the reply, "I can't do it. The oil from my wells is running to waste and I can't shut them down. Unless they are pumped the salt water will drown them out. I've waited just as long as I can, and if I don't turn my oil into the Cygnet's lines and take their tankage, I must go to the wall."

"We are making every endeavor to get iron for tankage, pipe for our lines, and the apparatus for our refinery. It was ordered weeks ago, and is expected daily. The companies are so behind in filling their orders that we have been outrageously delayed."

"Who tells you they are?" asked Knox.

"Mr. Wheeler," replied Cameron. "He explained it all to me yesterday. I met him at the Junction and had a long talk with him."

"Well, then, Wheeler lies."

"Mr. Knox——"

"Yes, Cameron, he lies, and I can prove it to you," replied Knox with considerable heat. "Here is a let-

ter which I received this morning from the Oleford Oil Well Supply Company. Now look at what they write."

Cameron unfolded the sheet and read:

"Replying to yours of yesterday, we beg to state that we can deliver iron for a 35,000-barrel tank at your station inside of ten days. As there is little activity in tank construction just now, plenty of riveters and experts in tank building may be secured here. We have a full line of piping and are ready to furnish almost any quantity you may want in car-load lots.

"Hoping to receive your esteemed orders, and promising prompt attention, we remain, etc."

"There," said Knox, "doesn't that prove that Wheeler lies?"

Duncan made no reply. He was as one who had been stunned by a blow, gazing vacantly upon his visitor.

"I have the highest regard for your word, Mr. Cameron," Knox continued, "but for the last week or ten days I've been convinced that Wheeler is a swindler of the worst color. He has been playing you and a good many others a deep game, and I am afraid that you will suffer by it in some way. I hope I am wrong, and if I am, I'll do the square thing and ask his forgiveness, and yours; and I won't breathe my suspicions to anybody else but you, until I get more proof. I don't want to do your company any harm,

if it is coming out as you expect, but you have always acted on the square, and I couldn't longer hold back what I have found out."

"I am indebted to you, Mr. Knox, for your interest," said Duncan, slowly, for he was evolving the matter as one in a dream. "I can't believe that there is anything wrong. Mr. Wheeler can explain it all. It may be that the Cygnet has prevented the Supply Company from selling to what promises to be a rival."

"Fiddlesticks!" snorted Knox. "The Supply Company would sell to you as quick as it would sell to me, and quicker, for you might be the larger customer. Mr. Cameron, why don't you follow Wheeler up and find out about this? It may be more important to you than you now think."

"I would go to him and ask an explanation if I knew just where to find him. He left either for Cleveland or Pittsburg last night."

"No, he didn't," said Knox, with still more heat and a few oaths. "He went to Bradan."

"To Bradan? Why he told me that he had an important meeting to attend in Oil City in the evening, and that he was then going either to Cleveland or Pittsburg, he could not tell which until he received some despatches."

"Well, he lied again."

"But how do you know that he went to Bradan, Mr. Knox?"

"He's to marry old Jim Tubbs's daughter some day this week."

Duncan reached out for support and Knox took him by the arm.

"Who has told you this, Mr. Knox?" he asked, feebly. "How do you know this?"

"The girl's brother, Coon, works on one of my wells. He was run out of Bradan by the police for some deviltry, and to escape arrest he came over here and went to work. He got a letter from his sister this morning, and that is what she wrote."

"Wheeler to marry Betsy Tubbs! Mr. Knox, there must be some mistake about this. It isn't possible."

"Why isn't it possible, Cameron? This man is an adventurer, probably a swindler, and I shouldn't be surprised if he skipped the country before he is forty-eight hours older. The girl hinted to Coon that they were going away on a long trip. He didn't tell me all she wrote, but he was bragging to us that there would be a big sensation in the oil-fields before the week was over."

Cameron looked at his watch. "There's no train I can catch till midnight."

"No, it's too late to get the six o'clock now," replied Knox. "But you can take the midnight train, and by waiting four hours at Charlton be in Bradan very early in the morning. That may be too late, but it is the best you can do now."

"Thank you, Mr. Knox; I will go. Please say nothing of this to anyone until I return. It may come out right after all. Mr. Wheeler surely has the privilege of marrying if he chooses."

"Cameron, I wish I had your capacity for faith. But, as I haven't, I can't help thinking that Wheeler is a black-hearted scoundrel."

And Duncan Cameron thought so, too. When he had gone into the old house, now bare and dismantled of its furnishings except in one room where he retained a few comforts, he dropped heavily into a chair and gazed helplessly before him upon a blank wall. He knew that his confidence and trust had been betrayed.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BUBBLE BURSTS.

WHEN Cameron alighted from the train at Bradan in the morning, a half dozen newsboys came trooping up the platform shouting their papers.

"Great excitement in the oil regions!" they called. "Independent refineries sold to the Cygnet!"

He bought a paper hurriedly, as did every passenger on the train, but he did not have the courage to open it there. He walked quickly across the street and entered the bar-room of a small hotel. There were no hangers-on at that hour and he took a seat at one of the tables and asked the bartender to bring him a glass of brandy. When he had swallowed the liquor, Cameron slowly unfolded the paper and read the announcement. The article said that a rumor circulated late the evening before was to the effect that President Wheeler of the several companies formed to operate independent refineries in the lower oil country, had disposed of all his holdings to the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company. Efforts had been made to ascertain the truth of the rumor, but all that could be learned was contained in a spe-

cial despatch from Oil City, which said that there was much excitement among producers in that field, and it was generally believed there that the rumor was correct. The article continued:

"It is known that President Wheeler retained control of all the companies formed, and in each instance he held the power of attorney which authorized him to buy, sell, dispose of property or stock, and to exercise all the functions of full ownership. He had argued that headway against the Cygnet Company, which he claimed he was endeavoring to fight, could only be made by prompt action and adroit manipulation, and with this end in view as complete power must be given the head of the competing companies as that possessed by President Lanphere of the Cygnet. Thus it was possible for him to make the rumored sale, if he has been base enough to do so."

Then followed another heading, which Cameron read, and the paragraphs following it, with brain on fire:

"WHEELER IN BRADAN!

"SAID TO HAVE MARRIED THE DAUGHTER OF JAMES TUBBS—MRS. TUBBS WILL NOT TALK.

"Wheeler has been in this city most of the time for the past several weeks. He recently formed the

The Spotter.

Cameron Farm Company, securing as a partner the owner of the farm, Duncan Cameron, who has won the reputation for being the most obstinate man in Pennsylvania, because of his refusal to sell or lease his tract, which is in the very heart of the Tuna-gwant district. Those who know the territory say that the Cameron farm is worth a cool two hundred thousand dollars and an eighth royalty, but it is understood to have been put into Wheeler's company at about forty thousand, for which stock in the company has been issued.

"Late last night it was learned on good authority that Wheeler and the dashing Miss Elizabeth Tubbs, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James Tubbs, who sold their oil property and came here some two years ago, were married in one of the villages just over the York State line early yesterday morning. They left on the 6 A. M. train, accompanied by Mrs. Tubbs, who returned in the evening alone. A reporter visited the Tubbs residence and finally succeeded in getting an audience with Mrs. Tubbs, who appeared at a second story window. She refused to say anything as to the whereabouts of her daughter and Wheeler, or whether they have been married. Mrs. Tubbs was very bitter in her denunciation of newspapers, as they have told the particulars of several disgraceful affairs in which her son 'Coon,' who left town suddenly a few weeks ago, has been engaged.

"Another reporter visited the residence of Mrs.

Duncan Cameron, who, with her daughter, removed here on the sale of their farm. Mrs. Cameron said she did not know that her husband's partner had been stopping in Bradan, but supposed that he was in the lower oil country most of the time. She also said that she had not seen any member of the Tubbs family except Mr. Tubbs, who called at her home yesterday. He said nothing, however, about his daughter. Mrs. Cameron was greatly distressed when she was informed of the rumors concerning Wheeler."

"My God! must poor Alice be dragged into this!" exclaimed Cameron, burying his face in his hands.

"Bad news, sir?" asked the bartender, who had been watching Cameron with some curiosity since his entrance.

Duncan looked up, half-angry over the question, but seeing from the man's face that the inquiry had been prompted by friendly interest, Cameron merely nodded his head.

"Wrong side of the market?"

"No; it is about this Wheeler affair. You have read the rumors in the paper haven't you?"

"They ain't rumors," replied the man. "Wheeler's fooled the whole bunch—he's beat 'em to a standstill, coppered all the cash the independents put in, turned the property they bought for him over to the Cygnet, touched old Tubbs for all he's worth, tucked the Tubbs gal under his wing, and skipped the country.

That's the only fool thing he did—taking that gal along. She's a flyer, and don't you lose sight of it; but how she fastened as smart a sailor as Wheeler takes my breath. She'll lead him a quickstep that'll shake the coin out of his purse in less than two years, or my name ain't Sewell. I've seen her kind before."

"You have heard more of this than the paper tells, have you not?"

"Should say I had," replied the man with the air of one who has been the confidant of many. "Half a dozen parties in here last night that knowed all about it. It's right, jest as I tell you."

"Where has Wheeler gone?"

"Oh, he's up with the Kanucks by this time, and before the week's out he will be on the briny on his way across."

"Did he marry Miss Tubbs?"

"That don't make any difference whether he did or not. Maybe he did, and maybe he didn't."

"It makes a difference to her poor old father," replied Cameron feelingly.

"Huh, he's an old mooner," answered the bar-keeper with disgust. "Three or four good people who didn't want to see him skun warned him against putting his money in Wheeler's hands, but he didn't mind 'em a jog. Wheeler put up a bluff that there's a big oil-field in Canada that he'd got a tip on, and he made old Tubbs believe that he could buy up a whole county and hold it for development and big prices.

I guess the old woman was Wheeler's right bower, and she drove the old man into it."

"But Mr. Tubbs has his place here yet, has he not?"

"No; mortgaged for every red it will bring, and all turned over to Wheeler and his duster."

Cameron arose and started toward the door.

"Hope you didn't lose anything by him, mister."

"Well, I hope not. I don't know yet," was Duncan's reply.

"Oh, you know all right if you was in with him. Every man that was has lost all that he was in, and that's the six sides of the block. Except Lanphere—he didn't lose. He furnished at least half the brains for the deal. If the devil don't drive that pair tandem yet then he don't claim all his own."

Cameron walked straight to the great, glaring, architectural monstrosity that was known as "Mrs. Tubbs's ideal," for it had been erected under her direction—a vulgar, obtrusive house that seemed to shout at you all the time you had it in sight, telling you over and over that its owner built it to show off his abundance of money and, incidentally, his lack of good taste. You were pained with its garish, bold, overdone insolence, and yet, from the moment it came into view until you had it well behind you, it was impossible to turn your eyes away. This was taken by Mrs. Tubbs as an evidence of admiration, and it gave her supreme satisfaction to stand in one of the win-

dows and contemplate the attention which her residence compelled from passers-by.

It was but a few minutes after seven o'clock, but Cameron's business was urgent and he did not intend to delay because of the hour. He pulled a brass door knob that was as large as an orange, and in a moment was gratified to see the door opened by Mr. Tubbs in person.

"Why, bless me, Mr. Cameron! how you surprised me, and I was thinkin' about ye all the mornin', too," exclaimed the old man, seizing Duncan's hand. "Walk straight in. Susan—that is, Mis Tubbs—ain't up yet. She don' usually rise till ten; that's the fashionable hour, you know," and Tubbs chuckled over his joke. "But you can just come in the dinin' room with me and have a bowl of coffee and a snack." And the old man drew his guest through the hall where Duncan, had he been in a mood to observe, would have noticed that all the glare and vulgarity of the place were not on the outside.

"I cannot wait, Mr. Tubbs, for I must go to Mrs. Cameron and Agnes at once. I came to inquire as to Wheeler. Is he here?"

The old man turned upon the inquirer a half-pitying, half-amused look. "No, Mr. Cameron, Wheeler ain't here, and I don't more'n suspicion that he ever will be here again."

"But he has been here?"

"Yes, been livin' here, off and on, for a month."

“And he has gone away—with your daughter?”

The old man did not trust himself to speak, but nodded his reply.

“They were married, Mr. Tubbs?”

“Yes, early yesterday mornin’. That was the one sensible streak Susan had ’bout it.”

“And is this that I hear true—that he has sold out the independent refineries?”

“I guess it must be, Mr. Cameron. He wanted the cash to invest in a new oil-field in Canada. Wheeler didn’t tell me much about his investments, but he said that he had some securities on which he could realize, and I guess he meant the independents.” And the old man grinned as though he had perpetrated another joke.

“Now, Mr. Tubbs, pardon me as an old neighbor. I hear that you entrusted him with your money to invest. May I ask if that is true?”

“Why, of course you may, Cameron. Susan—that is, Mis Tubbs—has been set on my investin’, as I told you once. Wheeler told her that he had a sure thing in Canada, and as he was goin’ to be our son-in-law, I forked over the whole pile and took his note—every blamed cent, except——” he bent close to Cameron’s ear and whispered—“two thousan’ as is salted, just as I said before.”

“Oh, Mr. Tubbs, I am so sorry. I fear that Wheeler is not honest and that he has played us all

false. You must have had misgivings about him yourself."

"Cameron," replied the old man, straightening up, "I follered the example you set me."

"Yes, I know. I set the example, fool that I was, and probably am beggared by his rascality, and by my own folly. You read the man—I know it, Mr. Tubbs, by your manner—and have beggared yourself with your eyes open. I do not know why you have done this, or why you have let your daughter marry him and go away in this manner, unless it is because you have been unable to withstand the pressure against you in your own home and have tired of it all. I cannot believe that you have followed me with the idea that Wheeler was a safe man to trust."

"No, Mr. Cameron. I have looked upon him as a sneakin' fraud for weeks. But I didn't know until a few days ago, when it was too late to warn or save you, that he was your pardner." The old man arose and laid his hand on Cameron's arm. "They've been drivin' at me to invest, and I've stood out against all the swindlers a long time till I found one as would do the job with a high hand, then I gave in. There ain't much left, except——" and he paused a moment to give his words an impressiveness that he felt the occasion required—"a lot of furniture that nobody else would buy, and some jewelry and clothes nobody else would want."

"But Mrs. Tubbs—does she believe in his honesty?" Cameron interrupted.

"To the dot. I told her all about it last night when she came back, and she almost eat me up for having suspicions. I feel sorry for Susan, though," said the old man with a grimace and a wink toward the door. "When she strikes true sand and finds her well's a duster, she'll have a tantrum that won't be pleasant to see."

"Surely, Mr. Tubbs, you cannot believe that your daughter has known of Wheeler's intentions to swindle her aged father and mother out of their property. I cannot think that Betsey ever could harbor such ingratitude in her heart."

Mr. Tubbs bit his lips and trembled pitifully, though he shook his head manfully.

"Mr. Cameron, when we lived back there in the holler, Coon was an innocent little feller, wasn't he? Trotted about with his daddy, fishin', huntin', doin' little chores on the farm—whistlin', singin' and playin' some tunes I taught him on the fiddle—just as happy and decent a little chap as was in the neighborhood?"

"Yes, Coon was all of that."

"Well, what did this money do but make him forget all his boyhood ways and change him into a young bumme—ashamed of his old dad, with never a civil word out of his head, but a sneer and a curse, and fault-fandin', and goin' his own gait until the

officers chased him away for his meanness. And Betsey—she want a bad gal—helpin' her mother with the work and over playin' with that little gal of yours—till the money come. Then she changed, same as Coon did, Mr. Cameron. Cuss the stuff! Old Jim Tubbs wishes it had burnt up afore he got it! Betsey was ashamed of her old dad all the time after it come; and she finally got ashamed of her marm. Susan couldn't learn the new ways, and Betsey could. She got so that she found fault with her mother, and nagged, and scolded, and was wimpy toward her. She thought she was rigged out to dazzle fashionable circles, and her marm and old dad was drags that was holdin' her back. She has been wantin' to cut loose, to get away, to be where she wouldn't be reminded every minit, and where others wouldn't know that her dad and marm was simply clay.

"I wrote Betsey and told her this, and put the letter down in her trunk where she'll find it some day," continued Tubbs, turning more towards the door and speaking as slowly and distinctly as his choked voice would permit. "And I told her that her husband had got all that we had in the world, and that her dad and marm will have to work for the little that it will take to keep them as they used to live. And I told her that Wheeler not only had all of Jim Tubbs's money, but that he had cleaned Cameron and hundreds of others out of theirs. I told her, too, that

pretty soon her heart would begin to turn to the old mother and father, and she would see where she'd did wrong. But I didn't blame her—Lord bless you, no, Cameron! I told her that we wasn't fitted to be rich yet, for we hadn't learned how to live. And then I asked her to go to work and try and learn how, for I know that she will be back with us, and I told her so. 'There'll be a place, Betsey,' I wrote her, 'for your old dad has some ideas how to make a way in the world. That cuss of a Wheeler will treat you like a slave, but when you can't stand it no longer, come home and we will all be happy once more.' ”

A groan, a feeble shaking of the knob, and then a heavy body pressing down against the door, brought Cameron to his feet. He stepped forward and with considerable difficulty pushed the door open sufficiently to allow him to reach the hall.

There, pallid, insensible, and looking, O, so old and worn in her finery, which she seemed never to leave off, crouching down upon the dazzling carpet, lay Mrs. Tubbs.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. WHEELER UNDERSTANDS.

MR. AND MRS. ELI WHEELER did not prove to be congenial travelling companions. Mrs. Wheeler wished to linger at the places they visited until she might form acquaintances and, perchance, create envy and astonishment over the richness of her wardrobe and the magnificence of her jewelry. Mr. Wheeler was desirous of hurrying forward, of attracting little attention, and of coming finally to Paris, where he might live in retirement for a time and further some schemes for the extension abroad of the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company, which was just then maturing the plan of embracing other countries. Wheeler was not many hours upon his journey before he begun to fear that he had gone a step too far in his dealings with the independents. The thought that he might be pursued haunted him, and though he feared little from a legal encounter with those whom he had so brazenly defrauded, he was mortally afraid that he might be the object of personal attack from some one of his many victims.

Upon one excuse or another he hurried his wife through Canada, sailed from Quebec to Ireland, made a flying trip to a few of the Scotch cities, and then hastened to London. They paused scarcely long enough to catch more than a fleeting glimpse of the places through which they passed, and by the time they reached the English metropolis Mrs. Wheeler's complaints had become tiresome and constant.

Wheeler secured comfortable, though very modest, lodgings, and when their luggage had been brought to the rooms he told his wife that at last she might unpack her trunks and they would begin to enjoy something of the life she had so fondly anticipated.

"What!" she said in no pleasant tones, "do you think of remaining in this dingy and out-of-the-way boarding house during our stay in London? I thought we were going to one of the fashionable hotels where other tourists go, and where we would have opportunity to mingle with people of wealth and style."

"But, my dear——"

"Oh, I am tired of your excuses and promises!" she interrupted. "There has been nothing else but this since we started, and it is time for something like living. Ain't we got the money to live as other folks do?"

"I have money to live and to travel as I choose," replied Wheeler, turning upon her with an air that betrayed his intention to throw aside his policy of

persuasion. "There are reasons why I do not care to attract especial publicity just at the present, and therefore we shall live very quietly, whether we remain in London or go further."

"Reasons? Yes, I suppose there are—at least you have said so times enough to make it true. But I would like to know one of them."

"Well, you, for instance."

"Me?"

"Yes, Betsey, you. See here," and he took her by the shoulder and turned her so that she faced him squarely. "I don't know what fiend in hell possessed me when I married you, for I could have skinned old Jim Tubbs out of his extra pile just as easy as I did Cameron and the others, without marrying his daughter. It was the one fool move in the whole play; but it's done, and I am going to make the best of it. As long as you behave yourself and do just as I want you to, I'll treat you white, my lady, and you won't have cause to complain. But as soon as you go getting your high horses out with an idea that you can take Eli Wheeler a race, I'll shake you as I would an old coat, and leave you to shift for yourself."

He spoke slowly and without raising his voice, but every word went to the woman's heart like the prick of a knife.

"It isn't so far from America to England that ugly stories may not travel," he continued, "and some of

the recent operations in the oil regions must be pretty well known to investors on this side of the ocean. At all events, I intend to keep shady for a few months, and I shall not permit a silly girl, who thinks a couple of trunks full of loud dresses will help her break into the ranks of royalty, dissuade me from that purpose. Do you understand the situation now?"

She attempted to speak, but her throat filled and she could only incline her head.

"We may stay here a day or a month; I can't tell until I get the letters which I suppose are awaiting me. While we stay, we will not force ourselves on society. Wherever we go, it will be in the most modest and unobtrusive manner. Possibly we will make a few excursions about the city to see the sights, though that will depend upon how you conduct yourself. You may unpack your trunks if you wish, and look your finery over while I am out for an hour to see if letters have arrived. I let you bring it along rather against my inclinations, knowing that it would not be possible for you to use it. There is no harm in looking it over, however, but it is not for your wear at present. Until such time as there is no longer necessity for caution you are to be plain—very plain; travelling with your husband who is abroad upon business."

Wheeler left her with this, and she stood, like one benumbed, looking at the door through which he had disappeared. In time her eyes wandered to her

trunks, and she recalled the day she had selected the larger one in the store in Bradan. Then she stumbled forward and sank down beside it, her hands wandering helplessly over the straps and buckles, but with no purpose of opening the cover.

"Dad, dear old dad!" she sobbed, "I know now what I've done, dad; but I didn't know it till to-day. I've broken your old heart, dad, for youns think I knew that Wheeler had robbed youns when I left with him. But, dad, I didn't know it. I'm not as bad as that—honor bright."

She became hysterical and clung to the straps as though they might save her from sinking beneath the waters that seemed to be rising over her. The glaring house in Bradan, the blotchy patches of framed color in its rooms, the incongruous furnishings and all the extravagant surroundings swept before her eyes. The efforts of her mother and herself to astound and awe their neighbors, the pride they had felt in Coon when he became sporty and made himself a place in the fast set, and the contempt and shame they experienced over her father because he would not, or could not, take kindly to the ways of the newly rich, came upon her in vivid pictures. Then the old home in the Cameron valley, simple, primitive, but, O, so peaceful, blotted out all else and awakened fresh outbursts of tears and sobs.

In time, poor, broken-hearted Betsey was exhausted and when Wheeler returned after an absence of a

couple of hours, he found her sleeping with her head pressed against the side of the trunk and her face stained with traces of her sorrow.

"She broke down easier than I expected," he said, without arousing her. "It is always so with a woman who has no training back of her, for she has nothing to rely upon. The fact that she has had her own way and dominated others by a show of cheap spunk is no help when a display of true courage is demanded. She'll fall in all right in time, and now that she knows what is expected of her, she may not give much trouble in the future."

Stepping forward, Wheeler took her not ungently by the shoulder.

"It isn't a good place to sleep," he said as Mrs. Wheeler started up, dishevelled and trembling from the floor. "There's a mark across your cheek where it rested on the edge of the trunk that looks as though you had been struck a blow with a whip. I declare," looking around, "you didn't unpack your wardrobe after all."

"No, I didn't care to," Betsey replied with some effort.

"Well, now that's lucky—very lucky, Mrs. Wheeler, as you would have had the work for nothing. We are going to Paris in the morning."

"To Paris?"

"Yes. I have a letter from Mr. Lanphere of the Cygnet asking me to go there at once and take up

several important business propositions for him, the necessity for which has arisen since our departure. I really don't like to do it, as I have been looking forward to a little rest after some years of hard work; but Mr. Lanphere has been so kind in taking some rather hazardous speculations off my hands that I feel like obliging him. I shall be detained there some months, possibly a year or two, but Paris is now a safe place in which to live, and of course you won't mind, Betsey."

"No," she replied, with a calmness that surprised him. "It doesn't matter to me. Paris or London, it is all the same."

"Now that's right, Mrs. Wheeler—that's the right way to look at the situation, and if you do not get away from that disposition I have no doubt you will be quite happy and contented."

The supper that was brought in from a neighboring confectioner's was eaten almost in silence. Wheeler was thinking of the articles he had read in the bundle of papers which he had received under the address of Mr. Cyrus White, and which were delivered to him by the solicitor in whose care they had been sent. In them he learned that Eli Wheeler had been anathematized by almost every independent in the States in which the oil industry was known, and the feeling against him was so high that threats of violence were spoken with a boldness that smacked of mob rule. In a half-dozen oil centers he had been

hanged in effigy, and in one place a man who somewhat resembled him was roughly handled and barely escaped a coat of tar and feathers before his identity was established. He read also that Judge Purser had been secretly aided to leave the country and was supposed to be in the West, and that no end of litigation was promised by those who were so shamefully swindled.

But it was Lanphere's letter that gave him the chief cause for unpleasant reflection. The president of the Cygnet wrote in a gossipy strain to Mr. White, speaking of Wheeler in the third person, and declaring that all transactions of the Cygnet Company had been carried on in entire good faith and with the supposition that Wheeler was an honest man who had the right to sell the properties. This Wheeler understood as a precaution taken for fear that the letter might fall into the hands of someone for whose eyes it was not intended.

"His greatest individual victim," wrote Lanphere, "appears to be a man named Cameron, of whom you may have heard. When the full effect of the deal with Wheeler struck Cameron, he put his wife and daughter in the care of an old man named Tubbs, also one of Wheeler's dupes in more ways than one, as he took with him in his flight a daughter of Tubbs whose only qualification was a pretty face. Tubbs and his wife were closed out and barely paid their debts. They are now living with Cameron's wife and

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daughter, who may have a few hundreds in cash. Cameron has disappeared. No one knows where or when he went. One-half the community believes that he has wandered away in a fit of insanity; the other half declares that he is on Wheeler's track."

There was nothing more, except in relation to the business that Mr. White was to take up in Paris.

The next morning when Wheeler was packing his portmanteau, Lanphere's letter fell from the pocket of a coat and lay on the floor. He picked it up, and stepping to his wife's side, held the envelope up for her to read the address.

"When we put foot upon the steamer to go to France," he said, in the same low, intense tone he used while speaking to her the day before, "I become Mr. Cyrus White, agent for American securities. The name of Wheeler is never to be used between us or to others until I give you permission. You understand, do you?"

"Yes, I understand, and will not forget," she said, quite unconcernedly. But later in the day he recalled that when she said it there was a peculiar gleam in his wife's eyes which he had never noticed there before.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHANCE MEETING OF OLD FRIENDS.

THE first few months of the stay in Paris of Mr. and Mrs. Eli Wheeler, *alias* Mr. and Mrs. Cyrus White, were uneventful. Apartments were selected with the end in view of living very quietly. Wheeler was not entirely unfamiliar with the city, for at a former time in his career he had spent something over a year in Paris, and the knowledge he then picked up stood him well in hand at the present. After a few days of investigation he engaged a Frenchwoman as Mrs. Wheeler's companion. She was known as Jeannette LeGarde, and was recommended as a shrewd and entirely reliable person. He believed that she was the right one to exercise a certain espionage over his wife, which he thought a quite necessary precaution.

Jeannette had a fairly good command of English and a complete acquaintance with the city. She was not far from the age of her mistress, a bright and engaging little woman when she wished to exercise her powers; but at the same time a sharp, hard, deter-

mined body when carrying out the directions of her master. Each morning before Wheeler went away to business he wrote the names of the streets which his wife and Jeannette might visit during the day, should Mrs. Wheeler be disposed to go out, and indicated the hours they were to be abroad. Often he came upon them quite unexpectedly when they were upon these little excursions, and Betsey grew to expect his appearance at any moment.

Jeannette was commissioned to procure for her mistress a modest wardrobe, not unlike that worn by teachers or numbers of shop girls whom they met every day. All the tawdry finery which Betsey and her mother procured with such lavish hands at her own home was taken away under Wheeler's direction and disposed of by Jeannette. When the trunks were looted of their wealth of costly silks, wools and laces, Betsey wept over each piece as it was taken out; but the woman who was her keeper looked upon the gowns and lingerie with no attempt to conceal her disgust. Coarse and ill-bred as she was, she saw in it only a display of vulgar taste.

"You could not wear these things here," said Wheeler in explanation to his wife. "Men would stare you out of countenance and insult you if you appeared in them on the streets, while women would treat you with derision. In time, my dear, you shall be provided with handsome gowns of Paris make, but at present there must be no display."

Indeed, Wheeler set her the example in plain dressing, for he wore a suit of English tweed, and sacrificed his cherished beard. The change in his appearance was almost as great as the difference in his name, and the capitalists with whom he consulted from day to day thought it strange that a great corporation like the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company, which was now reaching out to control the petroleum trade of the world, should be represented in Paris by so ordinary and common a man.

When they were unpacking her trunks, Betsey came upon the letter which her father had written and concealed in the folds of one of her dresses. She caught it eagerly to her lips and tears filled her eyes.

Jeannette, who had been bidden to watch closely that her mistress should neither write nor receive letters, held out her hand and asked that the missive be surrendered to her keeping.

"No," said Mrs. Wheeler with indignation little short of anger, "you cannot have it; nor can my husband have it. This is from my old father."

She went to the further side of the room, and Jeannette saw her kiss the paper and heard her sob as she read it line by line. She took no further interest in what was going on around her, but all the afternoon read and re-read the cramped and almost undecipherable characters. Jeannette heard her mistress talking to herself between outbursts of grief, but could

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distinguish nothing she said except the oft-repeated words, "Dear old dad! O, my dear old dad!"

Toward the close of the business day when Wheeler's return might be expected, Betsey tore the letter into tiny bits and scattered the pieces upon the coals in the grate. Only a part of the first page she kept, and put it in her purse. Some days later, when the circumstances had been duly reported by Jeannette to her master, Wheeler asked Betsey what her father had written. She frankly showed him the scrap of paper and he read these words:

"Dear little betsy i am goin' ter write youns jest as tho youns was a little gal livin' with me an' Ma an' coon on the old Farm in cameron Valley."

That was all, nor would she tell him more. He returned the lines without remark.

In the months which followed, Wheeler was not unkind to his wife, though she knew that when he was not present the French girl kept her under constant surveillance. He sent to their apartments pretty pieces of bric-à-brac and furnishings. The walls were adorned with a number of excellent pictures; fresh flowers arrived daily, and in time Jeannette brought a costume-maker, who selected materials and made up for madame a number of handsome gowns for house wear. The massive gold watch and chain, which had been the amazement of Bradan, several very large and ugly rings and some brooches of the same character, one by one disappeared, to be replaced

by artistic and delicately-wrought ornaments set with gems of no mean value or insignificant number.

Mrs. Wheeler learned that none of these gifts was for street wear. When she went upon her almost daily excursions with Jeannette, or accompanied her husband, as she sometimes did, to the theatre, she wore the dark grey that was so commonly worn by people of moderate station. She knew why it was. Eli Wheeler, known in Paris as Cyrus White, representing American securities, but chiefly Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company interests, lived in constant fear that some of the men whose confidence he had betrayed and whose property he had embezzled would run him down and make the attempt to secure satisfaction for their wrongs. At times he confessed to her that he entertained this fear, and admitted that he used every means to keep away from American visitors.

"Why do you not get Mr. Lanphere to settle for you with these men?" she one day asked him.

Wheeler looked at her and then burst out laughing. "Lanphere settle with anyone he has helped to do up!" he said. "That only shows what a child you are, Betsey. It isn't Lanphere's policy to settle with any man who has met him and been defeated in a business deal, much less with one who has withstood him. If I should suggest it, he would think I had gone crazy."

"But you surely do not intend to keep what you

have taken from my father, and leave him and my mother to live in want?" she questioned.

"No, Betsey, I don't. The truth is, I never felt just right about that little deal with Mr. Tubbs. I believe he knew all the time that I was trading in a gold brick scheme, and I have thought that he appeared glad to know that his money was going. Your father was never completely happy in the effort to shine in society, and he kept thinking with regret of the old days before his property came to him."

Mrs. Wheeler's face clouded and with difficulty she refrained from tears.

"I have been planning how I could send him some money without letting him know whence it comes," continued Wheeler.

"Oh, let me write to my father and mother and send them something," she pleaded. "They may be in want, or ill, and I know that they would tell no one that we are here."

"It won't do," he said, seeing that he had gone just a little farther than he intended. "If anything of that kind is done, it must be through Lanphere. But they are not in need at present. They are living with Cameron's wife and daughter, and your father has been making more than enough to support them out of a little business I got Lanphere to throw in his way. Let the matter rest, Betsey, for the present, and don't you attempt to write them, as it might

mean the loss of everything—my imprisonment, your destitution, and the ruin of the Cygnet.”

She remained thoughtful a few moments. “You say that father and mother are with Mrs. Cameron and Agnes; where is Mr. Cameron?”

Wheeler looked around in quick apprehension. “No one knows,” he replied in an undertone. “His wife and daughter think he is dead, as no trace has been discovered of him since a few days after I sold out to the Cygnet. Mrs. Cameron reported to the authorities that he appeared dazed by his misfortunes, as he persisted in calling the unexpected turn of his investment. One day he disappeared without a word of explanation.

“Pshaw!” after a moment’s silence. “I thought Cameron had more sand than that. He fought the Cygnet like a hero, and they could not down him either, till Lanphere put it in my hands.” He laughed with a certain pride in his victory, and his fingers sought his cheeks where they were formerly accustomed to twist themselves through his flowing side-whiskers. “He might have expected it, though, for he was a man of some experience in the world and should have known that individuals who attempt to stay the march of great corporations are swept out of the way like so many flies. What was Cameron’s fortune and happiness, or what are the fortunes and the happiness of a thousand Camerons, that they

should stand in the way of the success of an organization such as the Cygnet?"

Soon after taking up the life in Paris, Mrs. Wheeler commenced a regular course of study and reading. She asked for books, and though wondering where she learned which ones she most needed, her husband procured them. She did not tell him that the list was one that Duncan Cameron had prepared for his own daughter long before, and that through some chance it had remained in Betsey's possession. Wheeler was amused over the enthusiasm which she exhibited in this new work, but in time he came to consider it with something like amazement, for his wife made such rapid progress and stuck so closely to her studies that he daily marvelled over her improvement. He spoke with Jeannette concerning it.

"Ah, madame, read, read, study, study all the time. She walks the floor with a book in her hand, repeating that which she reads until it is learned by heart. When we go out to walk, she keeps the book in her hand until we reach the door, and on the street she is thinking upon that which she studies. So when we come to the door again she hastens to seize the book and find out if she has made no mistake. Every hour that monsieur is from home, madam is thus employed."

Wheeler noticed that his wife grew nervous and pale, and he protested that she was making herself ill by such constant devotion to her books.

"It will do me no harm," she replied, "and as I neglected study so many years, I must make an effort to catch up, now that I have the opportunity."

"But you have lost interest in all else," he continued, "and scarcely leave the house from one week's end to another."

"No, you are wrong. I have not lost interest, but new interests are awakened. Besides, the weather has not been pleasant, and so Jeannette and I have kept rather closely to our rooms. As the pleasant days come, we will go out more frequently."

"In a trifle over a year you have mastered a course that is not usually covered by a seminary student in three times that period," he persisted.

Mrs. Wheeler appeared to be pleased over this admission on the part of her husband, and before the subject was dismissed she promised to walk at least an hour in the open air every pleasant day.

Several weeks after this conversation, Mrs. Wheeler and Jeannette were one day taking an accustomed walk, when, upon turning into a rather narrow street leading back toward home, they saw Mr. Wheeler approaching from the opposite direction. As they neared him, a tall, black-whiskered man emerged from the door of a shop almost beside them. His eyes were bent to the pavement and he did not for the moment notice the presence of the ladies who were so near him.

When Mrs. Wheeler saw his face, she stopped abruptly and caught Jeannette by the arm.

"What is it, madame?" asked the startled girl.

"Quick!" she answered in a sharp whisper. "That man—warn my husband!"

The stranger at this moment raised his eyes and looked Mrs. Wheeler full in the face; then stepped forward a pace or two and stood before her.

"Mr. Cameron!" she murmured, still clinging to Jeannette's arm to keep from falling.

"Exactly, ma'am."

"Why, what brings you to Paris, Mr. Cameron?"

"I have come, ma'am, in search of Eli Wheeler."

At that moment Cameron felt a heavy stroke upon his shoulder, and turning, stood face-to-face with the man whom he had been trailing for nearly two years.

"Duncan Cameron, as I am alive!" said Wheeler, as though greeting an old friend, and at the same time extending his hand.

Cameron drew back, trembling with passion and indignation.

"You thief! you scoundrel! you deceitful cur!" he said through his clenched teeth, as he glowered at the man who had accomplished his ruin.

Wheeler paused to glance around them. Up to the present they had attracted no unusual attention from the few persons in the vicinity. He saw this, and turning with a smile, said: "Come, Cameron, you, as a man of sense, ought to know that it is to no purpose

to use language like that in the open streets of a city in which we are both strangers."

"Your pardon, messieurs," said Jeannette, stepping forward, "the police of Paris are most vigilant and are quick to apprehend those who engage in disputes. If there is a matter of difference between you——"

"A mere misunderstanding," said Wheeler, bowing.

"——there is a public house near where you may have a room to yourselves and discuss your affairs without interruption."

A glance of intelligence passed between the woman and her master.

"The girl is right," said he, turning to Cameron. "You and I can't afford to quarrel, Mr. Cameron, especially in the street. Indeed, I do not see that the necessity exists for a quarrel in any place; but if you care to talk over the—ah, misunderstanding which seems to have arisen between us, you may do it with more freedom and satisfaction where strangers and police officers are not present."

"As you please, and where you please," said Cameron. "I have not followed you all these months merely to say good-day to you and let you pass."

Jeannette beckoned to a dark-browed, keen-looking man who was lounging under an awning near them. As he approached, Mrs. Wheeler recalled his face as a familiar one, for she frequently wondered

why this man was so often near when she and Jeannette were walking. The man touched his hat, and Jeannette spoke a few sentences to him in an undertone. Then he turned to the gentlemen and expressed his pleasure in being able to guide them to "a very respectable and quiet public house."

Seizing her mistress by the arm, Jeannette turned and hurried her toward their apartments. Before proceeding far, Jeannette stopped and spoke to another man whom she called to her side with a gesture. Along with her other studies, Mrs. Wheeler had been picking up French words and phrases with amazing rapidity, and though the girl spoke in a low tone, Betsey knew that the man was told that his immediate presence was wanted at "La Vintage, in Rue de Seine."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE APPOINTMENT AT LA VINTAGE.

THERE was nothing in the wine room of La Vintage to awaken suspicion on the part of Duncan Cameron. To all appearances it was not unlike a thousand public places in Paris, or London, or New York, in which men assemble to drink, talk politics, lay plans, criticise the government, or to gamble in rooms provided for that purpose. Their guide exchanged a few words at the bar, and on returning to Wheeler and Cameron announced that a room would be made ready for them. He was given a coin by Wheeler, and disappeared. Presently a waiter beckoned to them, and they followed him into a long hall from which doors opened on either side. Through one of these they were ushered into an apartment of generous size. It was furnished with several small round tables and chairs at each. Wheeler directed that wine and cigars be brought, and when these were served, the waiter withdrew.

.. Filling a glass, Wheeler politely extended it to Cameron, but the latter shook his head.

"I could not drink with you, Wheeler. It is not pleasant to even be in the same room with you."

Wheeler's eyes were steady now. Cameron remembered them in that way that day back on the farm when the plan to organize the independent producers and refiners was unfolded.

"This is awkward, Cameron, decidedly awkward," he said, without apparently noticing the anger of the other. "I may say to you frankly that I am sorry that you followed me to Paris."

"Could you expect a man to do less—a man whose confidence and trust have been betrayed, who has been defrauded of his property and left a pauper? Is it unnatural that I should seek redress?"

"Under some circumstances, perhaps not. But in the present instance I fail to see what you may expect to gain by what must have been a long and very difficult trip. However, an explanation may clear the point, and so I should be pleased to have you tell me just what you want me to do."

"Restore every dollar that you stole from Jim Tubbs and embezzled from me," said Cameron, striking the table a blow that made the glasses jingle. "And more than that, I want a confession, signed and witnessed, that will lay bare the conspiracy between yourself and Lanphere and show to the world the great wrong done those who have been struggling to withstand the oppression of the all-powerful company of which he is the head."

“Is that all, Cameron?”

“I am in no temper to take your sneers, sir.”

“I observe that you are not calm, and I am sorry; it is so much easier to get along when one is calm.”

He selected a cigar and lighted it with deliberation. “Suppose I should refuse to grant these—let me see, what shall I call them—ah, requests of yours? What then?”

Cameron, half-rising from his chair, leaned toward Wheeler across the table.

“Wheeler, I am not the Duncan Cameron whom you found living so happily with his wife and daughter upon his farm, surrounded by his cattle and horses, which he had learned to love as beautiful and obedient creatures which God has given to aid man in his support. Nor am I the Duncan Cameron who heard the story you told of a mighty effort on the part of men who were oppressed that they might throw off the ever-tightening toils of an unholy corporation that was usurping their rights of trade and barter in a free and open market. Nor yet again am I the Duncan Cameron whose hand signed to you all that he possessed, and who was persuaded against his own judgment by the lies that were so ready upon your tongue. That Cameron was childish—I have outgrown him. That Cameron had forgiveness, compassion, tenderness and pity in his heart—this Cameron has brushed them aside until he shall have dealt with the man to whom such qualities are strangers.

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"If you refuse to restore to me that which is mine, and to give into my hands in trust that which I have demanded for others, I will take you by the throat as I would a cur that might attack me. I will drag you through that door, through the hall and the wine room beyond, into the street—and there, if you be yet alive, I will give you and myself into the hands of the police, believing that even in the courts of France the right will prevail."

Wheeler cowed before the white face and blazing eyes that looked down upon him. He glanced uneasily past Cameron into the gathering gloom of the room, and saw a screen near the rear wall noiselessly moved aside. He toyed a moment with his glass of wine, as though considering an answer. Then raised the glass towards his lips—and splashed the contents full in the face of the man before him.

Though blinded by the liquor, Cameron leaped the table and caught his assailant by the throat before he could rise. Wheeler was borne to the floor by the infuriated man whose grasp was like that of a trained athlete. In the instant that followed, Wheeler realized his helplessness and felt that his life was being crushed out by one tremendous outburst of awful passion. There was the roar of a swift-moving train in his ears and the shock of a trip-hammer upon his brain—then insensibility.

When Wheeler recovered, Jules, who had conducted them to the place, was supporting him upon his

knee. Henri, to whom Jeannette had given warning that he was wanted at La Vintage, was holding brandy to his lips. The table and chair had been righted, and candles were burning. By this light, Wheeler saw Cameron's body lying near.

"You were none too soon," he said feebly, after a moment in which he collected his wandering senses.

"Indeed, we were not, monsieur. He was like a tiger."

"Is he dead?"

"I think not, monsieur. The blow was with a sand club, for we did not know your desires."

Wheeler sipped some of the brandy and raised himself to a more nearly sitting posture. He glanced about the room.

"It is my desire to be rid of him," he said, quietly.

"It is easily arranged, monsieur," said Henri. "In an hour he will partially regain his senses and can be led hence between two friends—a drunken man who is being conducted to his home."

"What will you do with him, then?"

"A boat ride on the Seine, monsieur, to cool his head. He returns not."

Wheeler shuddered. Hardened though he was, this bargaining for the destruction of a man's life had about it something he had not encountered in the career of embezzlement and fraud which he pursued. He glanced at Cameron with something of pity.

Henri, noticing this and fearing that the opportunity to earn a liberal sum was slipping from them, shook his head and remarked: "Ah, monsieur, he is a dangerous enemy."

"Yes, too dangerous. What pay do you want, Le Garde, for this service?"

"Only five hundred francs for each."

"I have but a small sum with me."

"We have learned in the past that monsieur is a gentleman and a man of his word in matters of business. His promise is sufficient."

"The money will be paid to-morrow."

An hour later, Duncan Cameron, with eyes half-closed and head bent forward upon his breast, was led or dragged through the hall and wine room of La Vintage to the street. The scene was too common to attract attention from the few who sat at the tables in the dingy room, for it was only a stranger who had been drugged, or was drunken, and who was in good hands. Henri and Jules would take care that no money remained in his pockets when they should leave him, and upon their return all would drink to the happy circumstance.

The quay was almost entirely deserted, for a storm of sleet and rain was drifting up from the distant ocean, and its advance drove nearly everybody from the open air.

"We will have a rough night," said Jules, after

they had placed Cameron in a boat which one of them previously had secured for the purpose. "But it is very dark; we need not go far."

"Indeed, I do not think that morning will more than find us at our destination."

"Why, how may that be? We can safely dispose of this log in an hour."

"Fool! I am surprised over your lack of preception. No wonder, Jules, that you are always out of money."

"I do not see any advantage in rowing all night to tumble a man into the Seine when the shadow of the first bridge will serve all the purpose of concealment."

"Still Jules, the blind! Cannot you see that if this man dead is worth a thousand francs to M. White, he is worth alive ten thousand, or twenty thousand to Henri and Jules?"

Jules dropped his oar and turned in astonishment toward his companion.

"Ah, ha!" laughed Henri. "Has it at last reached your brain, my cousin? I have been bursting with it for an hour. I scarcely could hold myself, and I feared that monsieur would see it in my face and change his plans. But he is as dull an ass as is my fellow-villain, Jules."

"Die, no my precious fire-eater!" he said, tenderly raising Cameron's head and placing a coat under it.

"You shall not die. We will take you to Gaspard at Mantes—Gasperd the skillful who was driven out of Paris when the glorious Commune was overthrown—he will nurse you back to life and health. Then as long as you live, and while M. White has a sou in his pockets, you are as good to Henri and Jules as would be the Bank of France."

Quickly appreciating his companion's plan, Jules stripped off his coat and threw it over Cameron's unconscious form; then they bent together against the oars, as men who knew the work and the rewards before them.

Eli Wheeler left La Vintage a few moments later than the villains he had hired to make way with Cameron. He followed them to the quay, and upon arriving there could just distinguish in the distance a rapidly-moving boat. He smiled to himself with satisfaction that he was now free from interference in the enjoyment of his stolen wealth. He salved his conscience, as men sometimes do who hold dishonest gettings, with the reflection that if Cameron had submitted to the robbery with meekness and recognized in the great monarch of the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company a new development of industry that would go forward though it must rear itself upon the wrecked hopes and ambitions of thousands of individuals, he might at this time have been in his own home, possibly support-

ting his family upon employment furnished by those who had seized his substance. As it was—

Well, even Eli Wheeler shuddered as he saw in dark places along the street on his way home visions of Cameron's face floating on the surface of the Seine.

CHAPTER XV.**MRS. WHEELER LOCKS THE DOOR.**

MRS. WHEELER could not define the feeling with which she waited the coming of her husband. The quality of sympathy, which is found in its true sense only in those who have suffered, had been growing in her nature and was aroused to its sharpest degree. The remembrance of Cameron's wrongs, which she never fully realized until she met him in the street and there saw the great change in his appearance from the man she had known as a progressive and contented neighbor, awakened in her deep emotions. He was unkempt; he appeared to be in want, for his clothing, while not actually ragged, bore the stains of travel and hardships; there was in his face a look of hunger and hard denial of those comforts, and even necessities to which he had been accustomed; she guessed, and rightly, too, that there was not a sou in his possession, and that he was drinking from the very dregs of despair. All her well of sympathy was opened, and, if it had been within her power, Mrs. Wheeler would have put

forth her hand to save Duncan Cameron from the danger into which she felt he had been decoyed. An impulse seized her to return to the streets in the effort to again find Cameron, and to implore her husband to treat him fairly and with kindness.

Her husband! More than ever before did she realize now that she never loved Eli Wheeler. Vain, inexperienced, ignorant, aspiring Betsey Tubbs had been caught by the dazzle of the candle. Its flame, searing her wings, awakened her intelligence, and her one desire, since the hour his duplicity was fully revealed to her in London on their journey thither, had been to escape from this man whom she wedded in her blindness. All her love of display, her eager thirst for the grand successes in social life of which she had dreamed, and which Wheeler pictured so vividly to her as wholly within her grasp, were now of the past. She was contrite, humbled. The rugged honesty of her father arose within her, and she felt ashamed and disgraced to be supported by the money which Eli Wheeler had gotten through such shocking dishonesty.

Smouldering in her heart for months was a prayer that she might escape from the conditions which surrounded her and go back to the old home. Now it burst from her lips in nervous and almost incoherent sentences, broken by sobs and expressions of vain regret.

Almost since her first trip with Jeannette through

Paris streets, Mrs. Wheeler had been looking for Cameron's appearance. She knew her husband feared that he would come, and this led her to hope that it would so result. She thought of such a coming as almost certain to release her from the hated bonds, which were becoming more unbearable each day as her conscience broadened and her knowledge of right and wrong grew. She pictured Cameron as coming with authority, with the strong arm of right and of law to guard him—but when he appeared it was as a pitiful tramp, half-crazed by the haunting memory of his undoing, and with no thought other than to take by the throat the man responsible for his ruin and by force of grip to tear from his enemy that which had been lost. Thus he came, and she had seen him trapped and led away, perhaps to be murdered, while she was without power to aid or warn him.

Jeannette came to her with some show of affection and said that madame had no cause for alarm. Had not Jeannette's brother Jules, and her very dear cousin Henri, gone to La Vintage to be of service to Monsieur White? They were brave young men, and madame may be assured they will protect monsieur from his foe. Should it be necessary, they will fight for monsieur.

"It is not for the safety of monsieur that I fear," replied Mrs. Wheeler, unguardedly.

"Ah, madame, then for whom?"

“For this—friend; or he who once was a friend, who has been so wronged in the past and who is now trapped by one who has so much reason to fear him, and by hired cut-throats.”

“Cut-throats! Surely madame must have a high opinion of her husband to insinuate that the—gentleman, who seemed to interest madame so much from the moment she saw him, has been decoyed by monsieur into danger.”

Jeannette waited a moment for reply, but none came. In the months she had been in the employment of M. White she had not been idle in efforts to discover the history which she and her friends believed covered the past life of her employer. She learned little of value to them, however; but now she made a bold guess.

“Monsieur may have a cause. It is not often that a young woman loves two men, each old enough to be her father—her husband, and another.”

The mistress looked in astonishment at the up-raised and half-smiling face of Jeannette.

“Me! I love Duncan Cameron? Oh, no, Jeannette, I am not a French woman. This is not a love affair, Jeannette, be assured of that. I need not explain further than to say that Mr. Cameron has been wronged, cruelly wronged, and now I fear——”

“What, madame?”

“Another wrong, perhaps more cruel than the first, if that is possible.”

She attempted to interest herself in her books, but soon turned from them and wandered aimlessly about the apartments.

Jeannette met her master at the door and imparted to him the details of madame's conversation and conduct during the afternoon. When he finally entered the parlors, Mrs. Wheeler saw at once that he was unusually pale and that he wore a folded handkerchief about his neck. She ran to him in some anxiety and inquired what had happened.

"Nothing that is at all alarming," was his reply. "The air is damp and as I have a sore throat, I used the handkerchief to protect it."

"But—Mr. Cameron?" she inquired, hesitatingly.

"Damn Cameron! What concern is his welfare to you?"

"I want to know what has become of him," she insisted, firmly.

"Oh, you do! Well, just because I am in the mood, and not at all because you want to know, I'll tell you. He has decided to go back at once."

She waited a moment. "Did you—was there any trouble about a settlement?"

"The only thing that should be of interest to you is that your husband has returned to his home alive and unharmed; but that appears to be of no moment," replied Wheeler.

"You have told me that you are uninjured, and I have accepted your word for it. Now I ask whether

you have settled with Duncan Cameron; or have you left him in the hands of those who would do anything with him that you bid—even murder?”

He caught her by the wrist with a grasp that left its mark for hours, and pushed her rudely upon a chair.

“Curse that tongue of yours! What hellish idea has set it harping again about ‘settling with those I have wronged?’ I thought that by this time you had learned silence, but I see that you have only been smouldering to break out more violently than ever. Now, look here, Betsey”—and he shook his forefinger in her face—“I will say to you that your man Cameron is on his way to Havre, and that he will never bother me again—and be damned to him. You may spare your commiseration and sympathy. I made money out of him, and out of your somewhat amusing and extremely simple old fool of a father, in a fair contest of brains against cupidity, and I am going to keep it. You may stay with me and enjoy such portion of the cash as I choose to spend upon you; or you may go out into the street, where there is always room for women who have neither love nor sympathy for their husbands.”

She swept his threatening hand away and stood before him, blazing with indignation. He had never seen her just this way before, and he marveled over the change.

“I was silly,” she said, so quietly that he scarcely

caught her words; "silly, foolish and ignorant, but there was no taint upon my character. I was vain, easily led in many things, but never wicked in the way you suggest for my escape from the shame of living longer with an embezzler. You know this, and you know that my mother, a shallow woman whose poor head was turned with sudden wealth, still taught her daughter that there is no degree of want and misery that cannot be borne with a happier heart than the one which accompanies a life of wealth and dishonor."

Wheeler attempted to speak, but she would not listen, and continued:

"From this moment I would consider it as shameful to live as your wife as to take your advice and seek the streets of Paris. I have no money with which to return to my home, where I may find honorable employment, and I gather that you will provide me with none. I will sell such of the clothing and jewelry as you say is mine, and leave you at once in the full enjoyment of this which your dishonesty has won for you. Or, if this you prevent, I will go with nothing and trust a truthful tale to find the ears of people who will give me shelter until I earn the sum necessary to take me home."

"High tragedy!" he sneered, white with rage. "High tragedy from Betsey Tubbs—the new wonder and plaything in a cracked-voice chorus at ten sous a week. Possibly it is Betsey, the kitchen maid, or

Betsey, the cook, setting before the Parisiennes, whom she came to dazzle with her splendors, the corn cakes, boiled potatoes and fried pork of the Pennsylvania woods! Or, is it Betsey, the waitress, with fifty words of French in her vocabulary and the polished manners of the Junction House to recommend her? God! how Paris will rave over her!"

She made no reply, but stepped quickly past him, entered her room, closed the door in his face when he attempted to follow, and turned the key in the lock.

CHAPTER XVI.**MADAME AND JEANNETTE IN COMEDY.**

WHEN breakfast was served the next morning, madame did not appear at the table, nor did she make answer to her husband's summons, frequently repeated, or to his threats spoken through the door. The overture for a truce which he finally adopted was no more successful, and, so far as Eli Wheeler knew, he might have been making promises to an empty room, had he not felt certain that there was no way for his wife to escape from it.

Jeannette persuaded him to leave madame to herself for a few hours. She was still angry, argued the girl, but in time her temper would cool; or she would be brought into a more amiable frame of mind by the hunger which a perfectly healthy and vigorous young person might be expected to experience. This Wheeler finally consented to do, as he felt that he must keep his appointment with Henri and Jules at his office, and he was quite anxious to learn whether they had performed their murderous work. He impressed upon the woman the necessity,

of a close watch upon her mistress, and directed that under no plea should she be permitted to leave the apartments.

Not long after his departure, Mrs. Wheeler unlocked the door and entered the sitting-room. She was clad in a plain, serviceable dress and carried a small valise in which had been placed a few necessary articles of apparel.

"Jeannette," she said to the girl, "I am going away."

"But madame cannot go. Monsieur has forbidden it, and she must wait until his return. He has given me strict charge to——"

"It is not important to repeat his words. I have no doubt that he gave orders for you to guard me, Jeannette, but we will get around that. Last night he placed before me a choice, as you must know, for I saw you lingering at the door where you might overhear our conversation."

Jeannette was slightly confused. Surely, madame, whom she almost despised for her dullness, was more observing than the girl thought.

"But he was angered, madame, and now repents what he said in a moment of quick temper."

"He meant what he said and would be well pleased to be rid of me—except he fears that I would return to America and make known his hiding-place to those who may wish to prosecute him. I will not do that, Jeannette; I make that promise to you, for

you now are more deeply interested in him than am I."

"I, madame?"

"Yes, Jeannette, I have seen it for some time. There is something about this man that wins a woman, though I cannot tell what it is. You have not served my husband as his spy and confederate simply for the payment of wages."

"Madame, I protest——"

"Never mind, Jeannette; I have no feeling of jealousy whatever, for I can surrender him to you without a pang of regret. I am endeavoring to escape, and by doing so will leave him wholly to you. There is no reason why I should warn you, Jeannette, for you have seen the world and know the men in it. This much only I wish to say—his name is not the one by which he is known in Paris."

"I know it is not, madame."

"He has told you?"

"Madame, it is understood between my brother Jules, my cousin Henri, and myself."

"Then you have warning. I may also tell you that he has great wealth in his hands, and is well able to care for you and your relatives. See that he does."

"But, madame, should monsieur return to find that I have permitted your departure, his rage would be terrible. He would drive me from the house and set all the police of Paris upon your track."

"We will shield you, Jeannette, from any suspicion. You are clever enough to act a bit of comedy, for you may think the stakes worth the effort. Come here." And she led the girl to her room.

"In Canada I was ill with neuralgia and a physician gave me some morphine. Several of the powders are unused. See, we will take two and throw the contents of the papers out of the window"—suiting the word with the action—"and leave the empty wrappers here on the stand. Another we will put in the wine glass, and with it a few drops of wine, draining the liquor off to make it appear that the potion has been drunk from the glass, and that a small part remains. This paper we will put beside the others, carelessly—so. Now for the story:

"When monsieur comes home, as he will, as fast as a carriage may bring him, you will tell him this: You were alarmed over the continued silence in madame's room. You called to her frequently and received no response, and finally you set to work to gain entrance. With a piece of wire, a bent hair-pin will do, you worked the key until you heard it drop inside the door. You could see nothing through the keyhole, and still there was no answer to your shouts. You tried the keys in all the doors and discovered that the one from the wine closet would unlock this to my room. You entered, and saw me lying, fully dressed as now, upon the bed. You

spoke, and I did not answer, but when you took hold of my shoulder and shook me, I moaned, and would not awaken. You saw the papers on the stand and the wine glass, and when you saw the white dregs, you touched your finger to the wine and tasted it. The bitter taste convinced you that I had taken morphine. Then you ran bareheaded to the telegraph office to send a message to monsieur, and then came back with all speed to watch with madame and to try to arouse her. When you came to the room again, madame was not there!"

Jeannette's wondering eyes looked upon each action of her mistress as she moved rapidly about the room carrying out the details of the plot she had arranged. Was this the listless, patient, almost spiritless woman whom she had been guarding all these months without suspecting that she was anything more than a dullard who had few accomplishments, whose ambition had been throttled, and whose chief desire was to study everything printed in the English language upon which she might lay her hands? Was this madame, of whom monsieur more than once had spoken contemptuously as "an ignorant country girl with more beauty than sense," and who, in a moment of weakness he had married "just for the novelty of the adventure?"

Their eyes met, and like two women at a play who turn to each other when the climax comes in the comedy situation, they burst into laughter.

"Ah, madame, it is too clever," said Jeannette. "I cannot carry it on without laughing."

"Never fear, Jeannette; when it becomes real you will not be in a mood for humor."

"But where will you go, madame? What can you do without money or friends?"

"I may not tell you where I shall go. I have a few francs, saved a sou at a time for this hour, and I shall not suffer."

The girl hesitated, but to her mind came a compact that she had made with Henri and Jules when she obtained the employment with this wealthy American—brave, masterful Henri, to whom she was plighted, and between whom and her brother Jules there was an understanding that they should get M. Wheeler in their power and pluck him as he had plucked others. Madame thought that she, Jeannette, loved monsieur. Faugh! she despised him. She felt when he came fawning around her as though she must set her nails in his face and tear his blinking eyes from their sockets. She pitied madame without betraying it, and, too, in the end madame might be in the way of the consummation of their plans.

"Madame, we will play the comedy."

"Thank you, Jeannette," was the reply, and Mrs. Wheeler returned to her room without another word, and locked the door. She reclined upon the bed and awaited the raising of the curtain.

Jeannette's voice calling to her through the door was filled with emotion and deep concern. The working of the bent hairpin in the lock was sharp and unpleasant, and when at last the key fell out, her heart beat more rapidly and sounded strangely in her ears. One after another keys were tried and thrown down by the door casing, until the right one was secured and the bolt turned. The door opened cautiously; Jeannette approached the bed, speaking in frightened tones. Then the girl's hand touched madame's shoulder with a grip that brought pain, and she felt herself shaken with violence. She moaned and moved her arms, but did not open her eyes or answer her anxious, almost pitiful demands to awaken. There was a moment at the stand and the clink of a glass—a horrified exclamation from Jeannette, and then a rush of footsteps from the room and through the hall.

Mrs. Wheeler arose, adjusted her hat, and taking her valise from behind the door, left her boudoir. Passing through the sitting-room, she paused before a mirror and smiled back at the Betsey Tubbs she saw reflected in the glass.

CHAPTER XVII.

MONSIEUR'S UNPLEASANT FORENOON.

MONSIEUR was engaged in reading his American mail, which arrived that morning, and which contained additional directions concerning the establishment of several agencies which were well under way. The great aim of the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company must be carried out in France as well as elsewhere. "Absolute control of the market" was the watchword, and if opposition of any nature presented itself, it must be met and conquered at the outset. The letters which he received did not deal frankly and openly with the subject, but in every sentence there was a hidden meaning, and sometimes monsieur pondered long over these before he could make them out. When he read, "You may be able to popularize our product by inducing some men of prominence in town and city affairs to become customers," he knew that it authorized him to pay officials for concessions that might be wanted. Again, when he was told to "take all honorable means to maintain the superiority of our pe-

troleum against inferior opposition," he realized that he must exert all the cunning of which he was possessed and exhaust every last resort to confound and beat down opposition, no matter what it cost.

Written by Lanphere's hand and pinned to the letter of instructions was this note:

"Sam Edgert has been appointed guardian of the C—— girl, whose father has not been heard from since his disappearance. Edgert's son, a young lawyer, is said to be very actively endeavoring to bring before the courts, in the interests of the minor, an action in which it is expected fraud and conspiracy will be charged in the transfer of the Cameron farm."

Monsieur did not like this, and he showed his aversion to it by burning the note and crushing the ashes under his bed. Immediately thereafter he had other matters to think about, for Henri LeGarde entered the dingy little office and bowed to monsieur with the air of one who has performed a mission with which he has been entrusted.

"Monsieur," he said, "I have come as agreed, and have here an order for the share of the reward to Jules."

"Where is Jules? Why did he not come in person?"

"Ah, monsieur, Jules is not as strong as Henri. Last night there was a bitter storm of rain and sleet. It was required of Jules and myself that we

row a long distance upon the Seine, and when the journey was over Jules was exhausted by the cold. He lies at a small village some distance from Paris."

"I have no means of knowing whether the order is genuine or not, I will pay Jules when I see him."

Henri's eyes contracted and he looked at Wheeler for a full minute before he spoke.

"Monsieur will pay me upon the order of Jules, here and now," he said, slowly. "Such service does not enter upon a ledger to be billed the first day of each month."

Wheeler did not like the tone in which La Garde said this nor the look which accompanied it. He was not accustomed to fear, but just at this moment he felt himself trembling with nervousness.

"I meant no offence, LeGarde," he made haste to say. "It was merely a business precaution, but it is of no consequence. Let me see the order, please."

He unfolded the paper and instantly his eyes were riveted upon what was there written. His hands trembled until the paper rattled noisily, while over his face spread an ashen pallor like that upon one who is dead. This is what he read:

M. Eli Wheeler.—You will pay to Henri LeGarde the sum of ten thousand francs on my account. Failure to do so will make it necessary for me to return to Paris accompanied by M. Cameron.

Jules LeGarde.

"Damn you! it is blackmail!" said Wheeler as he sprang upon the Frenchman. Henri had anticipated this move, and darting under Wheeler's upraised arm, he caught monsieur around the body with a grasp that threatened to crush his ribs, and with a quick trip threw him backward upon the floor. With one hand and knee Henri pinioned Wheeler's arms, and with the disengaged hand drew a serviceable sheath-knife from under his coat.

"Monsieur," he said savagely, "not many years ago I saw service here in Paris under a noted leader in the Commune. I have cut many a man's throat for less than this which you have done, and I have not forgotten the trick. I can do it again, monsieur; very neatly and quietly."

Wheeler realized his great peril. He saw too that in his anxiety to be rid of Cameron he had failed in his estimate of these villains and thus committed a fatal error. They were not as dull as they appeared, and when once away from him had revived Cameron, secured his name and learned the advantage they held in keeping the Scotchman alive. How much of his history they possessed, Wheeler could not guess, but it was plain that they knew something which he hoped to guard. Now they must be silenced and Cameron must be disposed of, no matter at what cost. There was a dangerous look in LeGarde's eyes and Wheeler had little doubt that the man would scarcely hesitate over carrying his threat into exe-

cution and trust to getting his pay from the open safe.

"Let me up," he said after a moment's thought. "It is bad enough to be robbed without adding to it murder. I will pay."

"I have believed monsieur to be a man of wisdom, now I am convinced of it," said LeGarde, rising.

"The sum you demand may not be at hand, though I have kept some notes to use in emergency," remarked Wheeler as calmly as though concluding an ordinary business transaction. He opened the cash drawer of the safe and counted the notes into an orderly bundle. Standing within easy distance, LeGarde saw that monsieur had by no means exhausted his store, and for an instant the Frenchman's hand clasped the handle of his knife and a flash of regret that he had not used the instrument came upon him.

"Write a receipt," said Wheeler pointing to the table.

"I am not a child, monsieur. Lay the notes in my hand and with them the order from Jules. No writing need pass between gentlemen who understand each other."

Wheeler bit his lip in perplexity. He had no weapon of defence, he did not have the strength to cope with LeGarde, and it would do him no good to cry out, for the room in which they were standing was the only one which was occupied in that corridor. Clearly he was at great disadvantage, and

could only comply with the demand. He waited long enough to swing the door of the safe shut and turn the knob. Then he surrendered the money and the order demanding it.

"We will not quarrel, LeGarde, for it would be of advantage to neither. Besides, I am inclined to be liberal with you. There is something at stake, but not nearly as much as you may think, and perhaps the best way is for us to come to an understanding at once. Just what do you and Jules propose?"

"We have not considered it fully, monsieur, for there has been little time for consultation. We have in our hands a gentleman whom monsieur, for reasons best known to himself, greatly fears. This gentleman may as ardently wish to live as monsieur wishes him to die, and in that event it is merely a question as to which one will pay best."

"He has nothing to pay with," Wheeler interrupted.

"Ah, but he must have friends, monsieur, for he has not the appearance of one who is entirely without them."

"Has he told you this?"

"Monsieur will pardon me if I do not answer his question, as I am not the bearer of messages between monsieur and his enemy. Let monsieur say what he desires done and what he is willing to pay those who may do it for him. Then we will consider."

LeGarde was not entirely sure of his ground. Up to the time he left Jules and Cameron, the latter had not returned to consciousness and had mumbled but few intelligent words. They rifled his pockets and in them found a memorandum book bearing Cameron's name and address and numerous papers which they were not able or had not the time to translate, but which evidently were statements of accounts with one Eli Wheeler in some affair of co-partnership. They jumped at the conclusion that Wheeler had swindled the unconscious man out of a large sum of money; so while Jules remained in charge of Cameron at the house of Gaspard, a former physician who through fear had been driven out of Paris after the failure of the Commune in 1871, Henri returned to the city to make the demand upon Wheeler for ten thousand francs and at the same time to pick up possible information that might aid them in securing greater reward. At this moment he was anxious to return to Mantes, expecting to find Cameron fully restored. From him he believed the whole story might be extracted and then Wheeler would be entirely at their mercy.

An interruption at this moment prevented the execution of the plan, and for the time drove from Wheeler's thoughts all consideration of Duncan Cameron. A hurried footstep came to the door and a sharp, impatient rap followed. Wheeler bowed to Henri, who stepped forward and opened the door

upon a messenger. The man entered and presented to "M. White" the envelope which bore his name. Instinctively, Wheeler felt that it brought him news of an unpleasant nature, and he tore the envelope open with trembling hands. His eyes fell upon the single line—

"Come quickly. Madame has taken poison.

"Jeannette."

"Curse the damned idiot!" he shouted as he dashed toward the door. "Quick, LeGarde—get a carriage," and he flung money at the messenger as he pushed the man into the hall and slammed the door behind him. "Run, damn you, for a carriage!—a carriage with horses that can canter like hell itself."

He went down the stairway three steps at a time, and plunged, bareheaded, into the street. LeGarde and the messenger followed as rapidly as they could, and at the curb came upon Wheeler, waving his arms and shouting for a carriage. LeGarde silenced him with a word, and clutching him by the arm led him to the corner where he signaled to a coupé and thrust the frenzied man inside.

"The address, monsieur?"

"To my apartments by the nearest route and quickest possible time."

LeGarde gave the directions to the driver with the promise of an extra reward should he make rapid time, and stepped into the coupé.

"What has happened, monsieur?"

Wheeler handed him Jeannette's message. As LeGarde read it, the perspiration started upon his forehead.

"This is bad, monsieur."

Wheeler nodded and shouted to the driver to make better speed.

"It means the police—official investigation."

"I know—I know! The shallow-pated fool! Where did she get poison? Who thought old Jim Tubbs's daughter would ever care enough about anything to take her own life? On on!" to the driver, "a thousand francs if you will double your pace."

He was leaning out of the door in his eagerness, and LeGarde with much difficulty succeeded in pulling him back into the carriage and pressing him down upon the seat.

"Mousieur, monsieur, you must be calm! If madame should die, there will be necessity for the full possession of all your senses."

Wheeler sank passively upon the cushions and looked gloomily upon the streets through which they were rapidly whirling.

"Imbecile!" he muttered half-aloud, "why did I ever hamper myself with this woman?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

JEANNETTE PLAYS HER PART.

THE carriage scarcely came to a stop in front of the building in which Wheeler's apartments were located before he sprang from the step and hurried up the stairway. LeGarde bade the coachman wait his return and ran after monsieur with the agility of a cat. They came to the landing together and pushed through the door.

Jeannette, wild and disheveled, was pacing the floor, her hands clasped across her bosom and with every appearance of great mental distress.

"Where is she?" asked Wheeler, glancing apprehensively about the room.

"Oh, monsieur, madame, the poor lady, is gone!" said the girl with a sob.

"Dead!" and Wheeler grasped the back of a chair to keep from falling. "Speak, Jeannette, is she dead?" His voice was little more than a whisper.

"No, monsieur, she is not dead—she has disappeared."

He stared at the girl as one who hears but does

not understand. She bowed before him and wrung her hands in anguish.

"What does this mean, Jeannette?" said monsieur at last. "You send me a message telling me to come quickly as madame has taken poison; and when I come you meet me with the statement that madame has disappeared. Where is she—what is this story about poison?"

"I do not know, monsieur, indeed I do not know. It was true as I said, but now it is no longer so, for it is all a mystery. Oh, I do not know, monsieur; I do not know."

She was greatly agitated and ran about the room in an aimless and confused manner. Henri caught her roughly by the arm and thrust her violently against the wall. "Leave off this dribble," he commanded angrily, "and tell monsieur everything that has happened since he left you here to care for madame. Tell him all, I say, or your pretty throat will feel something rougher than a velvet ribbon!"

Jeannette winced with pain and cowed in fear before the man. She attempted to speak, but a sob choked back her words. Her cousin raised his hand as if to strike, but Wheeler caught the upraised arm and pushed the man aside.

"Let her alone, for she is already too frightened to speak." Turning to the girl he assured her that she would not be harmed, and asked her to tell her story freely.

"It was this way, monsieur," she said after a

moment's thought. She had not counted on the presence of Henri when she agreed with madame, and the appearance of her masterful lover nearly cost her all her self-control.

"Though I listened a long time after you went from the house, I could hear no sound in madame's room, and there was no answer when I called to her. I became frightened and struck upon the door, but still there was no answer. Then a greater fear came upon me, and I thought madame was dead."

Jeannette was gaining confidence now. She arose from the chair into which she had sunk from weakness, and with broken sentences and quick, nervous action explained how she had gained access to madame's room. She was down on her knees before the door working at the lock; she ran to and from the other doors as she had done when trying their keys; she led them to the boudoir, pointing out the squares of paper which had wrapped the morphia powders, and the bitter dregs of wine in the glass; she caught the counterpane in her hands and illustrated how the attempt had been made to arouse the apparently unconscious woman, who only moaned when shaken; she tasted again the morphia in the glass, sat the fragile vessel down with horror on her face. "Breathless I ran to the telegraph office, monsieur, and sent the message which you have. I did not know what other course to take—madame dead or unconscious here upon the bed, you should

be notified. I scarcely could write the words—to the clerk I could gasp but the one word, ‘haste!’ I ran back here, monsieur, not caring that they stared in wonder at me on the streets, and I was absent but a few minutes. I came with throbbing heart to madame’s room—she was not here! She was not there, or there, or there, or anywhere! I searched each nook—I went to the street—I asked some persons in the stairway who might have seen her. There was no trace.

“Then I came back and waited—hours, it seems, monsieur—waited until you came.”

The girl sank exhausted upon the floor and buried her face in her hands. Henri looked at her with a half-concealed smile of admiration, but Wheeler gazed upon the sobbing figure with a look of blank and helpless pity. He moved mechanically about the apartment, examined the papers on the stand as though something about the bits of tissue would give him a clue; lifted the glass and cautiously touched the powder with the tips of his fingers. His eyes wandered from one object to another, without comprehending what he saw. He was dazed, mystified, overwhelmed with the turn affairs had taken. In all his life, Eli Wheeler had never been so completely baffled as at this moment. By slow degrees his mind began to work, and then, soon, he saw the danger that might come to himself and the monstrous corporation which he served with so great fidelity if

his wife should succeed in making her way back to America. There was no other thought for her—of the dangers which might beset an inexperienced, friendless and penniless woman in the great city. He feared for himself only, and this fear brought action.

“It was clever,” he said, “very clever, and I almost admire her for it. We must have her back, LeGarde. Such a woman, running at large, may be dangerous. We must find madame before the day passes; but that should not be difficult, for she knows little of Paris, and doubtless is now within a couple of blocks of her home, confused and awaiting capture. Shall we ask the assistance of the police?”

LeGarde shook his head. “It is better not, monsieur, if there is anything madame may tell which you do not wish known. The officers ask many questions.”

“I know—I know. You think that she may be angry and would make unpleasant charges. Perhaps it is so. But what shall we do? Surely we cannot search Paris alone.”

“No, monsieur, for while doing so there would be time for many things to happen. There is another way as sure, but much less hazardous than through official channels.”

“And that, I suppose, is by the aid of those who were with you in the Commune?”

“I have many friends, monsieur,” said LeGarde,

slightly coloring, "whose business is to see and know what is going on in Paris. They are both men and women who have common interests at stake and who help each other in time of need in more ways than I care to tell or monsieur would desire to hear."

"Would it not be a risk to set this rabble on her track?"

"It is not a mob, as monsieur thinks, but here a man who is a shop-keeper, or his servant; there a waiter or a valet; a maid in some mansion, an advocate's clerk; one in the government service, another who may be the driver of a coupé or coachman for the nobility; thousands who may live as do I, upon their wits, and in performing service for those who may have unpleasant but necessary tasks for which they are willing to pay."

"Myself for instance."

"It is true, monsieur. It is necessary here in France that this should be so, for the people bear many burdens and wrongs at the hands of those who rule. If they were not linked together as I have said, their troubles would be greatly multiplied."

"You think this—well, this freemasonry of common sufferers—could find madame?"

"I am certain, monsieur, that it can be done, and without publicity."

"How soon?"

LeGarde shrugged his shoulders. "In an hour, monsieur, or in a day; or in any hour of a day in

a week. I cannot tell which one. Madame is not the child you have supposed. She has shown it here."

Wheeler nodded. "You want money. How much?"

LeGarde hesitated. If he knew only a little more of the history of monsieur!

"Fifty thousand francs," he ventured.

"Damn you, LeGarde, it is robbery! Ten thousand dollars for what you may accomplish in an hour! I won't pay it. Why, you may walk to the next corner and run plump into madame, returning of her own will."

LeGarde took an unfolded sheet of paper from the dresser, where it had lain unobserved by either Wheeler or Jeannette. He did not know what was written upon the paper, but he made a shrewd guess that it was some message from the missing woman, and he believed that it might aid him in concluding the bargain for the search. Wheeler caught the paper from LeGarde's hand and saw written these words:

"I have done as you told me, but not to follow your advice as to the future. I do not know how, but if you have not killed Duncan Cameron I shall find him and help him to escape. With your words ringing in my ears, and with your villainy all exposed before me, I have thought it out and see my duty."

Monsieur crumpled the paper in his fist and then tore it to bits. "Find her," he shouted in rage. "Set your thieves and cut-throats upon her track and bring her to this room. The money will be yours."

"Jeannette is the witness," said LeGarde.

"Yes, Jeannette is the witness, if you wish one. She remains here where she may be found."

"She goes with me," said LeGarde with decision. "There is work for her."

In a few moments they left the apartments and Henri motioned Jeannette to enter the coupé, which was waiting. He gave the driver an address and then took a seat in the carriage.

"Where is she?" he asked of the trembling woman as soon as the carriage started.

"I do not know, Henri—as God is my judge, I swear——"

"Pouf! Will you never forget your lessons in the convent? You can't lie to me as you lied to monsieur. I saw the deception in a moment; but he, the fool, did not think that pretty, innocent Jeannette was so great an actress. Where is madame?"

"Ah, Henri, I cannot tell—I do not know. As I love you, Henri, better than my life, I am telling the truth. I did lie to monsieur. I let madame escape, though the plan was hers, so that I should not be suspected. I did not intend to keep it from you, Henri, for have I not ever told you all?"

He looked at her steadily, but saw in her countenance no trace of deception.

“Then if you do not know where she is, monsieur’s reward may not be so easily earned,” he said at last. “It might have been wiser to have demanded a portion in advance.”

CHAPTER XIX.

OLD FRIENDS IN A STRANGE PLACE.

AMONG the studies which Mrs. Wheeler pursued was that of Paris. For several months each day she went carefully over sections of a small map which she had bought at a bookstall, and with such descriptions as Jeannette readily gave her, she became familiar with the general topography of the city. Moreover, she had been most observant while upon those frequent walks with her companion, and so when she tripped away from the door leading to their apartments there was neither indecision nor delay in choosing the course she should take. She felt quite sure of herself, and although for the first time in her life she was without an escort in the crowded streets of a city, she did not permit her self-possession to waver for a moment.

"The first and most important thing is to get some breakfast," she thought, "for I am nearly famished."

With this sensible object in view, Mrs. Wheeler passed through several sections of streets until she came to a respectable restaurant, in the window of

which there was a sign to the effect that English was spoken within. It was not good English, to be sure, but it served her purpose, and in a few minutes she was enjoying a substantial and appetizing meal, of which she ate with increasing courage.

When her bill was settled, she asked the waiter to order a coupé and to direct the driver to take her immediately to the American legation. "I have become separated from my party," she explained without a twinge of conscience over the slight deception, "and as I know little of Paris and less of the French language, I am under the necessity of seeking those who may best direct me."

"Ah, if madame will—ah—inform where she has been stopping, we will direct that she be returned without necessity of the visit to the Legation," said the cashier, coming forward from his desk and bowing before her most politely.

"No, it is best that I go first to the Legation," she replied. "I will soonest find my friends in that way."

A franc from her little store was added to the sum paid for breakfast, and the waiter hurried out to return shortly with the information that her carriage was in waiting. Mrs. Wheeler thanked him and in a moment was whirling away in quite an elegant equipage toward her destination.

As they approached the business section of the city she caught a glimpse of a carriage dashing past in

the opposite direction. A white-faced, bare-headed man leaned from the half-open door urging upon the driver greater speed. She shrank back upon the cushions in terror and for several minutes was almost unnerved by the brief vision she had caught of her husband. Then the humor of the situation came to her, and had the rumble of her carriage upon the pavement been stilled, the driver must have heard a hearty and not unmusical peal of laughter.

"Ah, Jeannette has sent her message, and it has been received," she said with evident pleasure. "As dear old dad would say, 'go it, Wheeler, you have got a bad spell of weather before ye, and no one's going to lend ye an umbrel'."

The ride was one of considerable length, but it gave her time for reflection. So far, her plan had been successful, and some encouragement was to be found in this. She knew that she was passing through an entirely new section of Paris, and that she was each moment going farther away from her home, and though Jeannette had told her wonderful stories of the ability of the Paris police to solve any mystery, nevertheless, Mrs. Wheeler felt that some time must elapse before they would be upon her track, should her husband determine to take that course. Until he had exhausted other methods of discovering her, she believed he would be reluctant to call upon the authorities. There was no reason to expect that he would make inquiries at the Lega-

tion, as he was not aware that she knew of its existence. By the merest chance she some months previously had come upon a magazine article describing the embassy. This she read and re-read until the place became to her like a fabled city of refuge, at the gates of which she need only knock to receive protection. She recalled, too, that some years before, when Mr. Cameron was endeavoring to instil a little knowledge of the world into the neighborhood where they lived, he once described at an evening meeting how the government was represented abroad, and one of the duties which he ascribed to the Minister was to protect citizens of the United States who might come to him in trouble. This all came back to her when she read about the Legation, and she entertained no doubt that this was the one place in Paris to which an American woman should go when in distress.

So Mrs. Wheeler came to the Rue de Villijust with confidence, and when the carriage stopped in front of the building and she saw the flag—like none other that she had seen since, the day she bade a careless farewell to her mother—it was but natural that she should feel that her freedom was near at hand.

There was a long half-hour of waiting, during which she went for the hundredth time over the story she would tell, and then Mrs. Wheeler was ushered into a pleasant office in which a number of clerks were engaged at their various duties.

To the secretary who received her, Mrs. Wheeler requested an audience with the Minister, saying with no small diffidence that she was an American lady in trouble who greatly desired some assistance in communicating with friends at home.

The young man explained that his chief was at that moment engaged upon matters of great importance and might not be at liberty during the afternoon. If madame would fully make known her errand, it could be taken up by some of the subordinates with entire satisfaction. Otherwise, she might give her name and a message of a few words which would possess the Minister of the importance of her visit, and then wait; he would see what might be done.

He took a card from the desk, and madame wrote upon it—"Mrs. Wheeler, upon a matter of life or death to a fellow countryman."

Madame was shown to an anteroom opening from the office, and here took her place with a number of others, and waited. Occasionally a door opened to rooms beyond and a messenger stepped out and called the name of one of those ahead of her. Mrs. Wheeler was engaged in calculating the probable errand of each and in wondering how long it would take to tell the story she had mapped out, when she heard the rather loud tones of a familiar voice, just outside the archway in the office she had recently quitted.

"I tell you it is the only place in the city where I feel at home," said the speaker, "and that's because the people around here talk plain United States."

"But we are here and ain't got much time to stay," was the reply in another strangely familiar voice; "and so we ought to see everything we can."

"I've seen all I care to of pictures, and artists and studios, and carvings, and bronzes, and Catholic churches, and palaces and gardens where they don't grow nothing but flowers; and I'm gol dum tired of hearing nothing but polly vouz from morning till night, and of having these old grinning, bobbing Frenchers constantly holding out their hands for franc pieces every time I turn around."

Mrs. Wheeler rubbed her eyes vigorously to make sure that she was awake. She rose, staggering from her chair and tottered to the entrance; stood an instant, swaying upon the threshold, and then stumbled forward with outstretched hands.

"Mr. Fisher!" she said, as a child might cry to its father.

"My God! it's Betsey Tubbs!" ejaculated the little bald-headed old gentleman who had been talking, as he leaped forward in time to catch the young woman in his arms and keep her from falling to the floor.

"Betsey!" cried Mrs. Fisher, coming forward to lend aid to her husband. "Why, mercy, mercy, child—how—why, you poor dear—there, don't faint—goodness, goodness she's gone! Quick, Arad, find

a place for her to lie down." And for the moment Mrs. Fisher took affairs of state in her own hands and directed the disposition of the insensible woman.

Betsey was conveyed to a retiring room and in a short time, through the ministrations of the motherly woman at her side, came to herself.

"I couldn't help it," she said apologetically as she kissed Mrs. Fisher's hands. "I didn't mean to; but I just couldn't help it."

"Of course, you couldn't, dear. I came pretty near fainting myself, when I looked up and saw you standing there."

"Thunder out of a clear sky ain't to be compared to it," said Mr. Fisher, who had been explaining to the polite young secretary that the lady was "a little girl who used to live neighbor to us in the oil country." "I wouldn't have been more surprised to have seen poor Duncan Cameron coming toward us."

Mrs. Wheeler's face clouded with a look of anxiety. "Mr. Cameron is in Paris," she said.

"Cameron! Cameron here in Paris? Why, everybody at home believes he is dead."

She shook her head. "No, Mr. Fisher, Cameron was here yesterday, and alive. He may be dead to-day."

Mr. and Mrs. Fisher looked at each other, dumb-founded.

"Was he—sick?"

The Spotter.

"No; I am afraid that he has been murdered. That was what brought me here. I was waiting to see the Minister."

"Cameron murdered!" said Mr. Fisher in a hushed voice, "and by these dum polly vouz Frenchers? Why, Betsey, tell me all you know about it. There must be something we can do."

With little detail, and without apology or extenuation for her own course in the past, Mrs. Wheeler related the facts that gave her so great fear as to Cameron's fate. Mr. Fisher interrupted her with a few questions to the point, and with numerous mild oaths, for which he was duly reproved by Mrs. Fisher. Then, when it was finished, he declared that they must see the Minister at once, even if they were compelled "to push the doorkeeper one side and break in on a diplomatic confab." He believed that there was no time to lose, if, indeed it was not already too late.

CHAPTER XX.

MR. TUBBS RECEIVES A LETTER.

ARAD FISHER was a man of some standing at the American Legation. He had arrived there with Mrs. Fisher several days prior to the one upon which they had so opportunely met Mrs. Wheeler, and announced that they had been travelling in the British Isles and were intending to spend some weeks in Paris before sailing for home. Mr. Fisher carried letters of introduction from several prominent Americans, including one from the Governor of Pennsylvania. He had a familiar way of making himself at home while in the Legation buildings or upon the grounds, betraying a sense of co-partnership in this one little spot over which the flag of his country floated. Every day he visited the Legation "to get some of the French out of his ears and mouth, and to be where everything wasn't polly vouz," he said. His open contempt for those who could not "talk United States," and his homely recitals of some of his experiences in ordering his meals, going from one place to another, and securing information

generally, were most amusing to the clerks in the Legation and brought back to some of them visions of scenes and characters with which they had been most familiar in the past. Mrs. Fisher, who was the constant companion of her husband, sometimes remonstrated, hinting that the gentlemen would think they had been reared in the woods.

"I don't care a dum, Mrs. Fisher," he replied. "The boys all know that we got our money by selling a mighty poor streak of land under which there happened to be a vein of oil, for a comfortable pile of cash, and after we once got our eyes open, we have been sharp enough to hang on to the money. They know that we ain't city raised, and what's the use of tryin' to make out that we ain't green? We are just travelling around so we can get good and tired of these foreigners and go home contented, knowin' that there ain't no other place in the whole universe that's better than the United States, and particularly Pennsylvania."

Mr. Fisher made his way directly to the chief of the department and declared that he must see the Minister at once upon a very important matter.

"I am sorry, Mr. Fisher," was the response, "but the Legation hours are over for the day and the Minister is not here. We simply were waiting to close the office until the lady who fainted should be well enough to depart."

"Where does the Minister live?" asked Mr. Fisher. I will follow him."

"That would not be possible to-day, as he has gone to Versailles to attend an important function which could not be ignored."

Mr. Fisher was annoyed. He thought a moment and then said: "Now, look here, Mr. Ellis, this ain't an ordinary case. A countryman of weuns is in trouble—maybe murdered. He came here to find a dum sneakin' cuss, who is mean enough to be a Frencher, and who cheated a lot of good men outen their eye-teeth, including the man who came to find him. He met the coot on the street and they had some words, and then they went together to a tavern to talk it over where the police wouldn't interfere. A Frenchwoman in the service of the swindler sent a couple of cut-throats to help her master. Late in the evening when the swindler got home he said the other man had started back on his return to America. Now, I know the circumstances connected with the whole transaction over home, and I know that the man who was the greatest sufferer never started back home alive without satisfaction from the man who ruined him. There has been a murder, or else as good a man as ever breathed is held a prisoner."

"This is rather serious, Mr. Fisher."

"Serious, Mr. Ellis, of course it is. I calculate that it is about as serious a piece of business as has

come up between France and the United States in some time."

Ellis picked up Mrs. Wheeler's card, which had been returned to him by the usher, studied it a moment and then turned to Mr. Fisher.

"This swindler, as you call him, is Eli Wheeler, is he not?"

"Yes, Mr. Ellis, that's the man. But—"

"And the man who searched him out is named Duncan Cameron?"

"Exaetly—Duncan Cameron. But how'd youns know this?"

"I have watched the case in the American papers. It is of interest to me from the fact that I am an Ohio man and, in common with others, have been deeply concerned in following the rise of the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company. That operation of Wheeler's with the independents some two or more years ago was little less than robbery."

"And the president of the Cygnet put it up."

"Possibly, but like a good many other suspected things, it cannot be proven. How long has Wheeler been in Paris?"

"Not a minute as Wheeler, but ever since he left the States as Cyrus White, dealer in American securities and promoter of the schemes of the Cygnet."

Mr. Ellis whistled. "So, M. Cyrus White is none other than Eli Wheeler? And the lady who wrote

this message is the girl who ran away with him after Wheeler swindled her father?"

"She didn't know it, Mr. Ellis. Don't blame her. She was an ignorant country girl, who, like all weuns when money come to us quick and easy all in a lump, lost her head. You'll find her repentant, and you'll find, too, that she's learned a heap in two years."

Mrs. Wheeler gave to Ellis full details of her meeting with Cameron and the events immediately following. He recognized that it was a delicate matter, and one that must be handled in the usual manner by turning the information over to the city officials and leaving it with them to act. Nothing could be done until the Minister's return in the morning, when Mr. Fisher and Mrs. Wheeler should meet him without delay and the subject would be taken up.

It was growing dark as Mr. and Mrs. Fisher, accompanied by Mrs. Wheeler, whom they would not let out of their sight, started for their hotel. A man who loitered near enough to the carriage to hear the address, which Mr. Fisher read from a card in his very richest Pennsylvania French, stopped to roll and light a cigarette as the carriage drove away. The glow of the match displayed the perplexed features of Henri LeGarde.

Late that evening, after dinner had been served

and their plans discussed, Mrs. Wheeler wrote this letter, which Mr. Fisher addressed and posted:

“DEAR OLD DAD:

“I am coming home. I have found Mr. and Mrs. Fisher, and they are to take me from this horrible place, and will bring me home with them. We must stay here a few days on very important business, and then we will go to London, and from there home. You don’t know how I love to write that word, Dad. I could just write ‘Home—Dad—Home—Dad’ all over the sheet and then not say it half as many times as I have said it in my heart every hour since I found Mr. and Mrs. Fisher.

“I won’t tell you anything about the man who stole your money, except to say that these kind friends have promised not to let him take me from them.

“Now, you dear, dear old Dad, break this news to Ma and get her prepared for my coming. You will know how to do it without letting her see this letter. And you be brave, Dad, and keep well. Mr. Fisher has told me about you, and though I will come back to you without any money, I am strong and know something now. We have planned it all out how I shall take care of you, and we will all be happy again.

“BETSEY.”

When old Jim Tubbs got the letter a fortnight

later, he took the collie out into the fields and read it to him a dozen times.

“I knowed the little gal had the right kind of a heart in her.” he said to the dog. “She was innercent and kind always, till her head got swelled with money; but, Lord, Don, it was only jest temperary. Folks what’s born and brought up right is like dogs what’s got good blood in ’em and is trained right when they’s puppies. They may git excited sometimes for a minnit and make mistakes, as you did when I caught ye barkin’ up the wrong tree for a coon the other day. But when I pointed out the mistake, you made up for it by gittin’ in the right place in a jiff and barkin’ twict as loud and fast as ye did before. Betsey made a mistake, Don; but, Lord, she’ll do all she kin to recterfy it.”

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COMMUNE AT WORK.

HENRI LE GARDE, followed by Jeannette, entered a confectioner's shop that was located in a large block mainly given up to small stores of a varied nature. They made their way directly through the salesroom into a common sitting-room at the back, and passing through the door, ascended a dark stairway to the floor above. Henri knocked at the door at the head of the stairs, and after giving a muttered password, they were admitted into a roomy apartment, dimly lighted from a shaft at one end.

A few men sat at small tables amusing themselves with dice or cards, and at another table four or five women of different ages were talking together over a couple of bottles of light wine. There was no furniture except chairs and tables. The room was stagnant with poor air, dirty and ill-smelling.

"Welcome, Citizen LeGarde," said one of the men, looking up from his cards. "We need new blood in the game, for it is going to no one's fancy. Sit in and take a hand with us."

"Not now, Citizen Lefevre," replied LeGarde, "there is work on hand for all, and it must be done at once. There are a few good sous in it, too——"

"Of which Citizen LeGarde will take care that he gets his full share," laughed the man who had been addressed as Lefevre.

Henri's eyes flashed and a scowl darkened his face. "Curse you Lefevre, have I not always paid you—and every citizen here, man or woman—liberally for what we have done together? Have I ever taken more than my just share, or have I ever refused to contribute to the common fund when the treasury of the Commune demanded it?"

"No, no," came from a dozen tongues, male and female. "LeGarde is all right. Don't mind what Lefevre says, for he has been losing his sous all the morning and must have a fling at some one."

"He might better be on the lookout for opportunities to help the Cause," growled LeGarde. "He, as well as others, spends too much time gambling and drinking, leaving a few to do the planning, thinking, and acting for the Circle."

Lefevre made no reply. He saw that the chief citizen was in bad temper, and former experiences taught him that there was danger in adding fuel to the flame.

"Call the others," ordered LeGarde, shortly. Two or three men and as many women disappeared through the doors opening from the two sides and one end

of the room, and in a few moments several other men and women came hastily into the hall. They all were of the same general stamp—none past middle age, and probably none under twenty years. They represented almost as many occupations as there were persons present, and while a few had steady employment, where they might be useful, the majority were prowling jackals, ready for almost any crime or adventure. It was a remnant of that Commune which for a time held Paris in its grasp after the withdrawal of the German army, and they lived here in the upper stories of a great block, where they assisted or protected each other as occasion might demand. It was the administration building or head center of that organization of which LeGarde had spoken to Wheeler, and the knowledge possessed within its walls of what was transpiring in the city was greater than that held by the entire police department.

“A woman is missing,” said LeGarde, looking upon the fifty or more persons gathered around him. “Some of you may know her, as she is the woman Jeannette has been watching so many months. She left her home an hour and a half ago, carrying a small handbag. She knows little of Paris, speaks only a few sentences of French, and has but little money. She ought to be discovered in an hour. Jeannette will describe her.”

Jeannette stood upon a chair where all might see

her, and in a few words pictured madame's dress and appearance so minutely that those who listened almost could see the woman they were to seek.

"She is one who by her beauty and the fresh glow of her complexion without rouge will attract attention," concluded Jeannette after describing the dress. "Her eyes are of strong blue and appear always to be asking a question. Her cheeks are round, her lips are rather full, and her teeth perfect. She has hair like no other woman in Paris. One might call it brown and another would declare that it is a dark auburn, but whatever it may be in color, it is like shimmering skeins of silk in texture and covers her head in a magnificent coif."

LeGarde added a few further particulars about Mrs. Wheeler's disappearance and then told them that the news must be spread through all channels. As soon as she was discovered, a message must be forwarded to him, while at the same time watch should be kept upon madame and every movement followed until he should arrive to direct the espionage in person and give further orders. "The reward," he said, "will be a hundred francs to the one who makes the first report concerning her, and fifty francs to each of those who may be called upon to assist in continuing the watch. If we are successful, it means another thousand francs for our treasury."

"And probably five thousand for LeGarde's belt," muttered Lefevre to himself.

In five minutes the room was deserted by all save Henri and Jeannette. In less than an hour more than a thousand persons in Paris were looking for Mrs. Wheeler. In an hour and a quarter LeGarde knew where she had eaten her breakfast. In another half hour he knew the name of the driver and the number of the carriage madame had employed in her trip to the American Legation. In another hour there came a report from one who had seen madame waiting for an audience with the American Minister, and three were watching to dog her footsteps should she emerge from the embassy. Then LeGarde and Jeannette went to Wheeler, who met them at the door, pale and nervous.

"What news?" he asked anxiously.

"She has been located."

"Where?"

"At the American Legation."

Wheeler staggered. "How in the devil did she come to know anything about the Legation? She has gone there to expose me."

LeGarde nodded.

"Has she seen the Minister?"

"She is waiting for an audience."

Wheeler launched a string of oaths that almost shocked the Frenchman and caused Jeannette to stop

her ears. When his inventions of blasphemy were exhausted, he asked LeGarde what was to be done.

"You must be ready to leave Paris at a moment's notice. The police soon will be searching for you and for one Henri LeGarde and his companion Jules; and also for a certain M. Cameron."

"You think that her game?"

"Yes; you were hard with her and she is angry. She will tell of this man's disappearance."

"But, if you have told me the truth, we can produce Cameron and refute her."

"Do you want that done?"

"No!" he shouted, with another torrent of oaths.

"Monsieur is again childish," said LeGarde at length. "It will not prevent his exposure to stand there and curse like a pirate. He must act. There may be some hours in which to do so, for a number of people are waiting for audience ahead of madame. Then, if she sees the Minister, there are certain forms to follow and delays to encounter before the information may be given the police. It is possible that nothing will be done before morning; but we shall know each step and can estimate the moment of danger with precision, for the watchers are vigilant.

"Monsieur must immediately go to his office and put his affairs in shape to leave. All securities, private papers and cash should be placed in as small parcels as possible so that they may be removed under

monsieur's direction. The papers and records belonging to those whom monsieur represents may be deposited with the company's bankers with the explanation that monsieur is called suddenly to England. In the meantime, Jeannette, with the help of those who may be trusted, will pack the articles in these rooms which belong to monsieur, and they may be stored where they may be withdrawn when it is safe to do so.

"By evening, if necessary, monsieur, disguised as an invalid gentleman, will be ready to leave Paris with Jeannette as his guide and nurse."

Wheeler looked at him passively. "Where shall I go?" he asked presently.

"To a very safe hiding-place not more than two hours' ride from Paris, and where you may be constantly informed as to the progress of events here," was the response.

"It appears to be the only course to follow," he said, after reflection. "I suppose it is at least the safest thing to do, until I may confer with my principals in America."

The remainder of the day was passed in unusual activity on Wheeler's part. LeGarde brought two young men whom he recommended as assistants, and as they were accustomed to clerical work, a number of letters were written at Wheeler's dictation explaining that M. White had been urgently and unexpectedly summoned to England, and that therefore

business transactions with the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company must be held in abeyance until his return, which might be expected soon. With his own hand he wrote President Lanphere and put him in possession of all the occurrences up to that time, and giving an address which had been furnished by LeGarde as entirely safe for future communications. In fact, the office of M. Cyrus White was dismantled and closed, and the man who so long had posed under that name left the place in feverish haste, carrying a portmanteau in which there were negotiable paper and bank notes to the value of nearly two hundred and fifty thousand francs.

In the afternoon a message from LeGarde informed Wheeler that his wife had quite dramatically met acquaintances at the Legation, that she fainted upon recognizing them, and that they were now closeted in a private room. Later, at an obscure hotel whither he had been directed, Wheeler met LeGarde and was given such an account of the incidents of the afternoon as best suited the purpose of the man into whose hands he had fallen.

Wheeler's one thought was immediate flight. He was led to believe that the Parisian police were even now in possession of the story and had commenced a preliminary investigation, which was not calculated to awaken alarm in the suspected persons, but which might result in sudden and decisive action. His fears were played upon until his condition became

one of panic, and he thrust money into LeGarde's hands without waiting to count it, begging the Communist to hasten the arrangements for his departure from Paris. Whispered consultations were held by members of the Circle who were continually arriving and departing with appearance of the greatest possible secrecy, and Eli Wheeler, the unscrupulous manipulator, the man who for years had been practicing the black art of deception with an adroitness that commended him to the high regard of the great originator of the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company, became a trembling, cowardly victim of his own strongest weapon.

It was nearing ten o'clock that evening when a muffled, bent figure, leaning upon the arm of a woman who was clad in a smart travelling costume, and whose face was scarcely distinguishable through a clever arrangement of her headgear, took the last way train from Paris toward Havre.

"Where do we go?" asked the apparent invalid of his companion when they were seated in their compartment, and the porter had deposited the portmanteaus beside them.

"To Mantes," she replied in a whisper. "It is but a short distance."

In this manner Eli Wheeler left Paris, nor did he ever see the city again. But there were those remaining who remembered him, for in the assembly room of the Circle that night, many a bottle of wine

was opened which had been purchased with his money, and the citizens there gathered laughed heartily when told by chosen aides of LeGarde how completely their chief's latest patron had shown himself a poltroon.

CHAPTER XXII.

A RIDE IN THE COUNTRY.

AT MANTES, whither they arrived after midnight in a storm of cold, drizzling rain, they were met by a shabby, ill-smelling, closed carriage driven by Jules LeGarde, though he was so muffled and tied up that he was not recognized by Wheeler. Jeannette exchanged no greetings that disclosed the identity of the driver, and they were soon upon the road leading toward their destination. The night was dark and gusty, and after the poorly-lighted streets of the town were left behind, Wheeler, peering from the carriage window, could distinguish none of the objects along the roadway. Suddenly there flashed upon his mind the thought that he was being taken away for the purpose of robbery, and he felt about in the carriage until he secured the portmanteau in which a large share of his treasure was lodged and drew it into his lap.

"Monsieur need not be alarmed," said Jeannette, "he is in the hands of friends."

"I do not doubt that, so far as you are concerned,

Jeannette," he replied quickly, "but it appears to be a lonely road and for the moment the fear of highwaymen came into my mind. You must know that in these bags there is a great deal of value."

"I know, monsieur," replied Jeannette with a sigh. "To one in my humble station it is a fabulous fortune. But it is as safe from highwaymen here, monsieur, as though locked in the vaults of the Bank of France."

"What guerdon of safety surrounds it here, in this lonely and desolate highway, with only an unarmed man and a young woman to guard it, and a driver who, perhaps, may or may not be a highwayman himself?"

Jeannette laughed and bethought herself that she must allay his fears.

"I forget; monsieur has not been informed in whose carriage he rides, or to whose retreat he is about to pay a visit, else he would not ask a question of this nature."

"No, Jeannette, I have not been informed; I do not know. I have trusted all to LeGarde—and you."

"That should be your assurance of safety."

"It may be so, but LeGarde has no interest in me other than that which is purchased. I have within the last few hours witnessed some exhibition of his power and resources, but I cannot escape the thought that it would be very easy for him simply to make

away with monsieur and help himself to what I possess in money and other valuables."

"Monsieur!" and Wheeler knew that Jeannette drew herself up to an attitude of indignation, "this is most unjust of you. Neither Henri nor Jules have given you cause for harboring such thoughts. Both have served you well, and will continue to do so until you are no longer in danger or in need of their assistance. They are poor men, monsieur, and have seen their hopes dashed to earth by the triumph of the military and money power of France. But they are not ungrateful traitors who will turn upon an employer who has treated them with consideration and generosity."

Wheeler thought of the scene which occurred in his office early the previous morning when Henri LeGarde extorted ten thousand francs from him at the point of a murderous-looking knife; but he made no reply.

"Monsieur."

"Yes, Jeannette."

"Has there been any act of mine that would lead you to have suspicion that I would consent to your robbery, or that harm would come to you in any manner?"

"No, no, Jeannette, surely there has not. You have been faithful—and truthful in all things."

"Thank you, monsieur," she said in a voice that trembled.

"I have depended much upon you, Jeannette, and without your help I do not know what I could have done. I—I have come to regard you highly, Jeannette—very highly, indeed."

"I thank you, monsieur; I thank you for those words," she repeated in low tones.

Wheeler's inordinate vanity for some weeks had been feeding upon the belief that he was making an impression upon Jeannette. He found her quick, vivacious, ready to aid and abet him, sympathetic—really a person of superior attainments. She had encouraged him, under her lover's direction, and madame's quick eyes detected it. There was reason now for still further encouragement, and so when monsieur put his arm about her waist and drew her more closely to him, fondly imagining that he had made another conquest, Jeannette did not resist.

"I might say, Jeannette," he continued, with his lips close to her cheek, "that my feelings toward you have reached a point where the simple, cold word regard does not express them. You have crept into my heart, little girl; day by day you have grown closer to me, and I have come to look upon you with love."

"Fie, monsieur!" and she struggled feebly to escape his grasp. "You should not say this to an honest girl. Pleasant as it may be to you—and to me, alas! you have no right to speak of it; nor I to listen. Think of madame!"

"Wait, Jeannette—dear Jeannette—I have a right to say that I love you, and you have a right to listen to the declaration. Madame never was my wife!"

Jeannette knew that he lied, and she hated him more than ever for it. She had come to have for Mrs. Wheeler a high opinion, which had been increased during the last few hours, and she consoled herself that in submitting to the present ordeal she would find some compensation in the belief that this man would soon get the reward due him for his treatment of madame.

"Ah, monsieur, this cannot be true. Madame was so good, so kind and ever had such a modest way."

"I swear it, Jeannette, and the proof of what I say can be produced. Madame is deep—deeper than either of us suspected. I did not know her until after we reached Paris, and then I learned only a part of her nature. She was almost a stranger to me—a young adventuress, whose pretty, innocent-looking face and guileless manner appealed to me and caught my fancy. The carrying out of great business transactions for the benefit of the whole world, but which were opposed by a few fanatics who did not know what they were doing, made it necessary for me to leave my country and go abroad, and this girl robbed and deserted her parents without my knowledge, and fastened herself upon me. Not until we were here some months did I know that she had left

her father and mother in actual want, and I then took occasion to relieve them.

"Of course it was weak and wrong in me to take up with her, Jeannette, but you know that she has a most attractive manner when she desires to display it. She blinded me to what was right."

"Did monsieur intend never to marry madame?" asked Jeannette, controlling her voice with difficulty, for she was growing more indignant each minute.

"At one time I thought of it. You recall how I disposed of her flashy jewelry and impossible clothing, and how I attempted to lead and influence her to adopt those manners and customs which would become the wife of a sedate and home-loving business man, or a gentleman of leisure and quiet tastes. But she was wilful and obstinate; and then when this Cameron appeared upon the scene, and after an interview, went his own way with money in his pocket, she accused me of all manner of crimes, and left me, as you know. I cannot guess what she intends to do with these people whom she picked up at the Legation, as there is no knowing to what ends such a woman's desire for revenge may lead her."

"Why do you flee from Paris, monsieur, in such terror, if what you tell me is true?"

"Through unfortunate circumstances madame has come into possession of some information which might be used against me to the damage of my company and my own financial ruin. In moments of

weakness I told her some things which she should not have known, and though they are not in themselves criminal, and are nothing of which I should be ashamed, they would do great injury to this business to which I have referred."

"It is very strange, monsieur, but I suppose I must believe what you tell me."

"You should do so, Jeannette, for it is the truth. I am free to love you, dear little girl, and I have done so for months. At times it seemed to me that I must take you in my arms and tell you so, but I have hesitated, fearing that you would not forgive my weakness."

"Ah, monsieur, it is not a pleasant tale. But women can forgive much, monsieur in those—in those for whom they have—affection," she said, her voice sinking almost to a whisper.

"Jeannette, dear Jeannette!" he cried, clasping her against his breast and attempting to press his lips to hers. She avoided him with a show of maidenly modesty, and after a struggle partially released herself from his embrace.

"Monsieur, you must have a care. I am not a child, nor am I one to let you fondle me at your will."

"Oh, my dear one," he continued with fervor, "why should we not leave France at once? We are free from LeGarde, who already has been well paid for all he has done for me. We are away from the

police of Paris, who may be looking for me upon some cock-and-bull story of—this woman. I have in my possession a fortune, one that will take us to any country to which we may decide to go, and keep us after we reach there. And, besides this which I have with me, there are thousands of francs, Jeannette, upon which I can draw, and it shall all be yours. See—”and he took two thick books from the inside of his coat and thrust them into her hands—“feel in the pockets, my darling. You can tell, even in the darkness, that they are filled with bank notes—thousands upon thousands of francs, and all shall be yours. And not only these, but other scores of thousands here in this bag. Come, Jeannette, why hesitate?”

“How can we escape, monsieur? What plan do you propose?”

“We can stop the driver and command him to return to the station—tell him I have changed my mind, or anything else. If the order be accompanied by a few francs, he will be entirely agreeable and will keep his own counsel. From the station we ought to be able to catch a train that would get us to Havre soon after daylight, and thence we may easily secure passage upon a steamer for some country—I care not where if you are with me.”

“But, monsieur, the—the marriage?”

“Ah, you little Puritan, that shall take place the

first moment we reach a place where we are free from pursuit."

"Oh, monsieur, what would become of me if you should deceive me? I think of how you told madame to go from you, and without money to buy even a loaf of bread."

For a moment, Wheeler was silent. "I promise you, Jeannette, upon my sacred honor, that the marriage shall take place."

"Perhaps you promised the same to madame."

"I swear, then, by every hope of happiness, here or hereafter."

"Ah, monsieur, oaths are so soon forgotten."

"Then here," and he began emptying his pockets into her lap. "I strip myself of every sou I now have in my possession. Here, and here and here—you cannot see the notes, but you know their texture and must understand, as I have told you that there are thousands of francs. In this valise is more—I do not know the sum, but it will fill your pretty head with visions of luxury and ease, could you but catch a glimpse of this wealth. Take it all; hold it in your possession until I keep my promise to make you my wife. We will go as I have said, and you shall be my banker."

The man was beside himself. For the time he forgot every danger and would have accepted any chance.

"Monsieur, forgive me, I have wounded you," and

her arms met around his neck and brought his head upon her bosom. "I know now that you are in earnest in what you have said, and that you intend to deal honorably with me. Forgive me, monsieur."

"There is nothing to forgive, my darling one," he replied, returning her embrace with a warmth that was unmistakable. Then lifting his head: "Let us stop this driver at once and return to Mantes. Each minute is important to us."

"Wait a moment, my dear monsieur," she replied, almost in a whisper. "I am so happy that I cannot bear to think of any interruption—of the return to streets and lights where people, always curious and impertinent, watch one's movements; where we will be called upon to travel a long distance bearing toward each other the appearance of master and servant, and where we may run into dangers that cannot be foreseen. Monsieur, if we could only go forward like this, by ourselves, forever! But that is impossible, as there will be spies everywhere in France who soon will be informed of our disappearance."

They had been riding forward in the darkness nearly an hour, and the last half of it over a road so rough and uneven that Wheeler had complained about it several times. Scarcely had Jeannette made her confession of happiness in monsieur's arms, before the carriage gave a severe jolt and then came to a halt. Almost immediately they heard cries and

groans from the driver and were aware that the horses were plunging.

"Highwaymen!" gasped Wheeler in a husky whisper, disentangling himself from the girl's embrace.

"An accident," said Jeannette. "No highwayman would touch this carriage—it bears the sign of the Circle. Hasten, monsieur, to assist the driver. The poor man may be badly injured."

Wheeler fumbled badly with the carriage door, not especially desiring to open it, as he was only partially convinced that he would not meet the grasp of a robber as soon as the door swung open. Finally, however, he stepped cautiously to the ground, but in the blackness of the night could distinguish little more than dim outlines. He called to the driver and asked the cause of the trouble.

"Help, monsieur, for the love of God, give me help. I am injured, monsieur, and fear I am dying. Hasten, hasten, I faint!"

The man's voice sounded as though he lay upon the ground near the forward wheels of the carriage, and Wheeler cautiously groped his way toward it. Jeannette glided past him and went to the heads of the horses. The driver continued to groan from what appeared to be great pain, and Wheeler took him by the shoulders and gently drew him from a position of evident danger.

"Steady, monsieur, you do not know how you hurt me—ah, that is better—no, no, lift my shoul-

'ders, quick! There, so;" and the poor fellow painfully gasped for breath.

"How are you hurt?" inquired Wheeler with anxiety, for he feared that the man was dangerously injured.

"It is in my back and shoulders," came the faint reply. "I cannot raise my arms—ah, Blessed Virgin! the pain—it will kill me." He was silent a moment but for a groan, and then continued: "I fear I dozed on my seat—the wheels, falling suddenly in a rut—threw me head foremost from my place—under the feet of the horses."

He spoke in broken sentences and appeared to be exhausted by the effort. Jeannette approached in the darkness and stood beside monsieur. She asked if there was not a lantern in the driver's seat.

"No, mam'selle; unfortunately, there is none," he whispered.

"Is there no help near?" asked the girl, bending down in tender solicitude.

"A short distance back—a peasant's house—ah, monsieur, monsieur, the pain! Raise my head—there; it is easier."

Jeannette and monsieur conferred together a moment, their voices almost drowned by the suffering man's groans.

"Monsieur will go for help if you will direct him," said the girl, kneeling beside the driver.

"It is not far, mam'selle. Follow the hedge—on

the right until he comes—the first opening.” He paused from weakness. “There in the field—back from the roadway—an orchard. He will find it there—the peasant’s home—Jean Benoit and his two stout sons.”

They heard the man muttering his prayers with his expressions of pain.

“Go, monsieur, it is a duty,” said Jeannette, urging him from her side. “Shout for assistance as you run, and you may awaken them against your coming. Pause a moment and shout twice at the opening of the hedge, monsieur, and I will call to you in return so you may know that all is well with me. Ah, God! this is a fearful hour to be left with a dying man, and the sound of your voice will sustain me.”

Wheeler caught her a moment in his arms and kissed her unresisting lips. Then, with a promise to make all speed, he hurried away, keeping close to the hedge and halloing as he ran. He stumbled into ditches, or plunged into the long and thorny branches of the sweeping hedge, but these accidents did not deter him from pressing on with such haste as he could make in the darkness. At length, when almost in despair of coming upon the opening, he saw the space at his side. He paused to gain breath, and with his hands beside his mouth he shouted twice to Jeannette. Faintly and far away he heard the answering——

"Halloa! halloa!"

Before Eli Wheeler had gone fifty yards upon his search for assistance, two strange things happened at the carriage. Jules LeGarde, the driver, rose from the ground, his sides shaking with laughter, and in the enthusiasm of happiness caught Jeannette in his arms. From the rear of the carriage where he had been perched during the entire drive, Henri LeGarde stepped down to seize the two in his arms, all three dancing in a circle like children.

"Cease," said Jeannette, "you are smothering me with your embraces."

"Oh, but such a wonderful little woman deserves embraces," said Henri, catching her around the waist and sweeping her from her feet. "The stage loses the greatest comedienne of a century when you become my wife. What say you, Jules?"

"Indeed it is true; but listen—do you not think monsieur has a strong voice?"

Together they laughed over the manner in which Wheeler had been tricked.

"It is better so than an unpleasant encounter with monsieur," declared Henri. "Had it been necessary to bind and gag him, and leave him here beside the road, possibly with wounds, there would have been a pretty hue and cry over what the public would declare to be a bold outrage. As it is, he ran away without threat or show of violence, leaving his money to the care of others who will disappear."

"Thus making it partly his own fault that it was lost to him."

"Entirely his own fault, for the unprotected woman, left alone with the dissembling driver, was overcome by him, gagged and abducted."

"Ha, ha, ha, was there ever such a simple thing."

"And it is to Jeannette that we owe the plan."

"Yes, Jules, to Jeannette, the minx. I think she wanted to be made love to."

"Henri, you know it is not so," she protested. "I suffered it because I did not wish you to be party to a greater crime."

"Tish, tish, girl, I know how you felt; but I doubted the success of the plan until I heard him swearing everything and giving up all if you only would elope with him. O, it was rare," and again he went off in laughter. "But sometimes I felt like cutting a hole through the carriage top and punching monsieur's head."

Jeannette put her hand playfully over Henri's mouth to keep him quiet and they heard again the distant shouts.

"We must return at once," said Jules, "for it will be daylight in an hour and there must now be no miscarriage of our plans."

"True," replied Henri, releasing Jeannette. "Until we come to the old house near Mantes, you shall guard the money which you won so easily, while Jules and myself will act as your coachman and

guide. You deserve a trumpeter and postillions, but they might attract too much attention at present. When night comes again, we leave for Italy—you and Jules and I."

"And Felice," said Jules.

"And Felice, of course. In my own happiness I forgot that there are to be two weddings."

Jeannette, standing on the carriage step heard the distant voice—

"Halloa, Jeannette, halloa!"

Without a tremor of voice, she answered monsieur as she had promised.

Henri and Jules mounted the driver's seat, the horses were turned sharply to the right, upon a firm, smooth roadway, and the carriage disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DISCOVERY AT DAWN.

WHEN Wheeler paused at the opening of the hedge, he waited long enough to hear the faint call of the false Jeannette in answer to his shout, and then turned directly into the field. From the dim outlines of trees about him he came to the conclusion that he was following a road leading through an orchard.

“Halloa, halloa!” he kept shouting. “Help, help! A man is injured and dying by the roadside! Halloa, halloa!”

The path was so indistinct that he soon lost it and ran aimlessly among the trees, sometimes striking the low branches which let loose a shower of water, and again coming up against the trunk of a tree with a bump that sent him sprawling to the ground. He continued to shout until his voice became husky and he was compelled to partially cease his cries. After an hour’s fruitless search, he suddenly came upon a hedge, which he turned and followed, hoping it would lead to the entrance into

the highway. At last he came to an opening, but found therein a gate. This he surmounted, landing in a field planted with vegetables, between the rows of which were muddy pools that came to the tops of his shoes when he attempted to press forward.

Realizing that he could make no progress, Wheeler returned to the hedge and crept shivering under its thick branches to shield himself from the storm, which had increased in intensity. He then began to review in sequence each event of the day and night and had not proceeded far in this analysis before the truth burst upon him.

"Fool! dolt! idiot!" he exclaimed, striking his head with his clenched fist. "I have been played like a damned imbecile, and they've landed me. I am not fit to be called a man—a weak, silly calf! Faugh!" and he launched forth a volley of oaths that had neither connection nor relevancy. "Jeannette!" and his teeth bit together with a snap. "Bah, how the wench wheedled me—Eli Wheeler, who turned for Lanphere the trick on the independents and fooled the best men in three states." He struck his fists into the thorny branches and took comfort in the fact that the backs of his hands were bleeding.

"The whole thing was put up, and Betsey was as deep in it as any of them—probably Cameron, too—and I am robbed, fleeced, turned into a field like the ass that I am, without a sou; to freeze, or starve, or drown in the mud, or to go to hell!" Again he

gave way to the most fearful and meaningless oaths.

When he tired of cursing, Wheeler looked about him to notice by dim outlines that dawn was approaching. He found the gate and leaped it at a bound. Following a cart track he ran through the orchard and finally came upon the opening through which he must have passed under Jules LeGarde's directions. Turning to the right he continued to run along the highway, and at length came upon a spot which he recognized by the marks of the carriage wheels and tramping of horses' feet as the scene of the fictitious accident. He noticed that for some distance the carriage had been driven outside the beaten track that there might be color for the claim that the driver had been jolted from his place by the character of the road. In the soft soil he discovered the print of Jeannette's shoes beside the tracks of heavier boots. These he stamped upon like one possessed of a desire for some sort of revenge. Here the injured driver had lain, and Wheeler picked up stones and hurled them with curses at the spot.

Finally the spasm of anger exhausted itself and Wheeler took notice of his surroundings. On the side of the highway opposite the orchard and field which he had entered, Wheeler saw a peasant's house and other farm buildings. Numbed, beaten, dejected, and without purpose he made his way thither. The door to which he came was fastened with a clumsy

latch of wood, which Wheeler lifted from its place. Without knocking, he pushed forward into a low room, littered with furniture and household utensils, barely discernible in the dim light. At the further side of the room he saw the outlines of a couch, and this he approached with the one desire to throw himself upon some place that promised rest.

But as he came to the side of the couch he saw a man lying there—a man whose head was bandaged—covered with a clean, warm blanket, sleeping like a child.

Wheeler bent forward to peer into the face, but started back as though he had been dealt a blow. He was looking upon Duncan Cameron.

Cameron! the hound who had dogged him to Paris, who had threatened him, who no doubt played upon the cupidity of the LeGardes and told them enough of Wheeler's history to put into their hands a weapon by which they could extort money; Cameron, who had come upon him when he was so secure and comfortable and was on the eve of further success; Cameron, who may have been a party to the plot through which Wheeler had been plucked; Cameron, who, now that Wheeler's wife had escaped him——!

Curse the poor, blind fool of a meddler who had played a game of such obstinate resistance to the Cygnet and who might yet accomplish much greater harm!

The Spotter.

Wheeler was neither cold, nor weak, nor trembling now. Anger, hatred, and revenge thrilled him like an electric shock. He had been fooled, cajoled, robbed; but now he would get his pay. He listened, but no sound came to his ears save the regular breathing of the man on the couch, and the drip of the eaves. There might be other people in the house—no doubt the LeGardes—but they were in the rooms beyond and were sleeping. Why hesitate? In a moment he can be free from this man forever, and in another moment he can be back there upon the highway. The household may not awaken in an hour, and another hour may pass before anything is discovered. Even then there will be no reason why he should be suspected. Why hesitate?

He looked about the room for a weapon and his eyes rested upon a heavy iron skillet with a long handle. Stilling his breath, Wheeler sank to his hands and knees and crept upon the floor lest his steps would cause the boards to creak and awaken his victim. He poised the weapon in his hand and smiled to find that it was not unlike a maul, with which he could deal one swift, effective blow. Then, with muscles tense as steel, he made his way slowly toward Cameron, ready each instant to overleap the remaining distance if a movement gave warning that the sleeping man was about to arouse. When he came to the side of the couch, watching Cameron's face with an intensity that must have penetrated the

veil of sleep and startled the dormant senses from their lethargy, Wheeler drew himself to full height and swung the weapon above his head.

A dark object leaped through an opening which Wheeler had not observed in the ceiling of the room, and before his blow could fall, the man who never before that moment came so near committing a cowardly murder was crushed down upon the floor. So sudden and violent was the attack that an appreciable space elapsed before Wheeler realized what had happened. He found himself in the grasp of a peasant whose face was nearly concealed by its heavy beard and whose eyes blazed with an anger that was not comfortable to behold. The peasant was of low stature, but heavy, compact frame, and the hand which in no ungentle manner pushed Wheeler back upon the floor when he attempted to sit up, was of enormous size and as hard as the hoof of a horse.

Cameron, awakened by the clang of the falling skillet and the plunge of the men upon the floor, reclined on his elbow and looked wonderingly at Wheeler and his captor.

"Does monsieur know the assassin?" asked the peasant.

There was the appearance half of recognition and wondering doubt in Cameron's face as he looked at Wheeler. Twice he started to speak, and each time shook his head and bent his brows as in the effort to recall something that had escaped his recol-

lection. He shuddered and sank back upon his pillow.

"No," he finally replied. "I have seen him only in my dreams. I do not like to see him, and I am wondering why you keep him here. What has he been doing, Gaspard, that makes you hold him by the throat?"

"Nothing, monsieur. It is only what he tried to do. Come"—to Wheeler—"you are no company for a man who is ill."

The peasant dragged Wheeler to his feet, and with that vice-like grip still upon his prisoner's throat, led him from the room. There was nothing tender about the manner in which Wheeler was conducted to a building used as a granary, and which was one of the several wings of the house, extending toward the barn. It was unlighted, except by several small openings near the roof; but this was not a matter of concern to the man imprisoned there. He heard the bar drop into place outside the door which was shut upon him, and in a condition bordering upon collapse he sank upon some sacks of grain and almost immediately fell asleep.

Hours later, Gaspard's rough blows and shouts aroused him and he partook of food and drink. The peasant remained while Wheeler ate, ravenously, for he was nearly famished, but spoke no words. When the meal was finished, Gaspard directed that

his prisoner follow, and he led to the highway. Here he gave to Wheeler a handful of silver, and with a wave of his hand toward the west, said in a tone that could not be mistaken, "To Havre."

"To Havre?" asked Wheeler in astonishment. "What do you mean? I have no desire to go to Havre. I tell you, as I attempted to make you understand before, that I have been robbed of large treasure, and I demand to know why I have been kept a prisoner throughout the day, thus giving the thieves time to escape?"

"Monsieur, I know nothing of robbery. I know only of an attempted murder."

"It is a lie," declared Wheeler, stepping out of the Frenchman's reach, for he had no desire to feel again that hard hand at his throat. "The man in your house is one of those concerned in my robbery. I meant to injure him, as I had a right, to make sure of his capture."

"This is a foolish tale, monsieur, for he whom you attacked had not risen from his couch through the day or night. He was injured in an accident of which you may have some knowledge, and has neither strength nor mind to sustain him in an expedition of robbery."

"I insist that the authorities be summoned and that steps be taken to apprehend those who have stripped me of all I possess. Surely in France there must be some measure of justice."

"So there is, monsieur, if you will have it; so there is, and Gaspard LeBoyne will see that you get it. I am an honest peasant, who has some knowledge of healing, living upon my own lands. To my house was brought before break of day yesterday a man with an injury upon his head, and from which his full recovery is in doubt. I promised to give him the benefit of my skill and my poor care and protection, and he was placed in my charge.

"This morning at daybreak, monsieur enters my house, unbidden, and recognizes in my charge his enemy, whom he has traced here in some unknown manner. If monsieur saw in this, my charge, a thief and robber, why did he not wait and demand of the authorities his arrest? Did the sleeping man threaten monsieur? Was monsieur in peril of his life? Or, did not monsieur have time to creep along the floor and select a weapon and then in the same manner come again to the bedside of his enemy and rise to strike him dead?"

The peasant waited a moment for Wheeler to answer, but as there was no reply, he continued:

"If monsieur will go with me to the Prefect at Mantes, we will each tell his story, and let justice be done—for there is justice in France."

Realizing that a chain of circumstances had been woven about him from which he could not escape, and fearing that by this time the authorities in Paris might be upon his track, Wheeler saw no course open

except to make his way to Havre and secure passage thence to America through some means not at present clear. Without a word of reply, he accepted the silver offered by the peasant, and started forward upon his journey.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SEQUEL TO THE COMEDY.

THE American Minister was awaiting the arrival of Mrs. Wheeler and Mr. Fisher with some knowledge of the story they had to tell. Ellis had put him in possession of the main facts, and with no small indignation he gathered the full details of the disappearance of Cameron.

"It is monstrous, Mr. Fisher," he said when the recital was concluded, "and I shall lose no time in acquainting the authorities with the full story. No doubt they will desire to have the recital first-handed from Mrs. Wheeler, and if you will kindly remain a short time the consultation may take place here."

In half-an-hour Mrs. Wheeler and her escort were summoned to one of the offices, and in answer to many questions, propounded to them through an interpreter, they gave the police such information as they possessed.

The following forenoon they went again to the Legation and from the Minister learned that a report had been made to him the evening before. It

was to the effect that M. Eli Wheeler, *alias* M. Cyrus White, had disappeared. With him had gone the LeGardes, Henri, Jules and the girl Jeannette. The office of M. Wheeler had been visited, but it contained nothing beyond a litter of papers of no apparent bearing on the case except to disclose that there had been a hasty flight. The apartments occupied by M. Wheeler and madame had also been under examination and were now watched. Some furnishings of considerable value remained, along with a quantity of clothing, evidently madame's, but all portable articles of value were missing. The police learned that these were taken away by persons under the direction of Jeannette who held the warrant of monsieur for their removal.

The search was to be continued. Madame was advised to go about the city freely in company with her friends and to have no fears, as an agent of the secret service would be near her constantly to observe any suspicious characters who might approach her.

So the trio settled down to the enjoyment of Paris and for nearly a fortnight they experienced much pleasure in daily excursions about the city. One morning Mr. Fisher found in his mail a letter postmarked the afternoon before and addressed to Mrs. Wheeler. She opened it with no little curiosity and read:

“Madame:

“The comedy which began in your apartments had

scenes in which you were not permitted to participate and of which you cannot have heard.

“Monsieur found that it would be necessary for him to leave Paris, and I was appointed to accompany him some distance upon his journey. Our course took us over a lonely highway at dead of night, and while we were riding thus, monsieur with great fervor implored me to consent to a change of plans and join him in a flight from France. I chided him for his desertion of you, when he became melodramatic and swore that you were not his wife. I charged him with an attempt to likewise deceive me, and to prove his earnestness he began to thrust into my hands the money which he had taken with him in his escape from Paris, saying I should keep it until he had made me his wife.

“Ah, madame, it was like no scene in comedy you have ever beheld.

“But then came the climax. The driver of our carriage was my brother Jules, and he is an actor of no mean ability. Monsieur was led to believe that an accident had befallen and that the driver was dangerously injured through a fall in the road. Would monsieur seek help? Ah, he hesitated. Was help near? Yes a short distance along the road was the house of a peasant—and the poor driver was in such pain, moaning and mumbling his prayers together, and crying out in agony to keep from laughter.

Monsieur would go, and I would stay by the suffering man, who might die in the darkness!

“And so monsieur ran away with a hedge to guide him, on the wildest chase man ever took, leaving the girl whom he had sworn to marry, and the princely dowry which he thrust into her lap—leaving her to be kissed and praised by her brother Jules, to be kissed and petted by her lover Henri, who all the time was at hand to give assistance should it be required.

“The comedy ended, madame, when monsieur made his way with a few sous in his pocket to Havre and took passage for America upon one of the vessels engaged in freighting for the company which he represented.

“You desire to know what became of M. Cameron. He was injured in an encounter with M. Wheeler at La Vintage, and Henri and Jules were employed to convey him upon the Seine and leave him to his fate. However, they saved his life and concealed him until he was able to travel, when he was put upon a vessel bound for Scotland. He was provided with funds to reach his old home and to sustain him for a long time after his arrival there. Though physically well, M. Cameron has not regained his memory, and he imagines himself still a young man who has never been away from Scotland until in some mysterious manner he was brought to France. The

skilled man who tenderly cared for him says that he may never recover.

"This letter comes to Paris by the hand of a friend and will reach you through the mail. You may show it freely to the police, for there is no danger that it will betray the place where we are now very secure and happy.

"Madame, farewell.

Jeannette."

"Well, I'll be dummed," exclaimed Mr. Fisher, rubbing his hands with glee as Mrs. Wheeler finished reading the letter. "If the Frenchers haven't given Eli Wheeler a dose of his own medicine, then I'm a Seneca Indian."

"Why, what has happened to him?" asked Mrs. Fisher. "I don't understand the woman's letter."

"What has happened to Eli? They've robbed him, Mrs. Fisher—cleaned him out as slick as a whistle and scared him so that he dassent come back to Paris. Then they've turned him loose to make his way to Havre, where he begged his way back to America on one of Lanphere's oil ships. It's jest one of them cases that old Dominie Perkins out in Bradan would call 'righteous retribution, or fit punishment for a mean sinner.' I'd give fifty dollars to stand at Tompkins' Cove when that freighter gets in so that I could ask Eli how he liked his voyage."

Mrs. Wheeler paid little heed to what Mr. Fisher said, and when he turned laughing toward her, he

noticed that her face was grave and that she was still bent over the open letter.

"Why, Betsey, you ain't regrettin' the little run for his money the polly vouz give Eli, are ye?"

She smiled quickly. "No, Mr. Fisher, I scarcely thought of it. What troubles me is this that Jeanette has written about Mr. Cameron."

Mr. Fisher was sobered in an instant. "Cameron, bless me, that's so. I was so pleased to hear about Wheeler getting his cummings that I forgot poor Cameron. Gone back to his old home in Scotland—lost his memory—thinks he's a boy, and don't remember anything since that time! Say," he said, starting up as though ready for instant departure, "do you know where in Scotland Cameron's old home is?"

"I do not," replied Mrs. Wheeler. "I think I have heard Mr. and Mrs. Cameron both speak about the village, but I have forgotten its name."

Mr. Fisher whistled a few notes of "John Brown," the only tune he knew. "Now we have brought up against a snubbin' post for sure. Scotland's got more dum little towns than Pennsylvania, and we can't look into each one for Cameron," and he continued the tune on the note upon which he had stopped, but only to go half-way through a bar. Again he stopped in the middle of a note and let the pucker of his lips broaden out into a smile. "Why, we'll write to Sam Edgert and tell him all about it, and he'll send an

answer to Edinburgh. We'll have Cameron in less than a month."

So while Mr. Fisher hurried away to the Legation to lay before the Minister and police authorities the letter from Jeannette, Mrs. Wheeler wrote such an account of events as would be necessary for Mr. Edgert's information. A few characteristic sentences were added by Mr. Fisher on his return, and that evening the letter was upon its way. The next afternoon saw Mr. and Mrs. Fisher and Mrs. Wheeler speeding toward the Scottish city.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE BOYHOOD HOME.

THEY came upon Duncan Cameron near the little village of Dunoon on the rocky western coast of the Firth of Clyde. Before meeting him they were warned by sympathetic townspeople and neighbors that he was "Nocht but a puir lad wi' na min' o' the years syne he went oot and canna talk about onything that befell him."

It was learned that Cameron appeared at the village one afternoon carrying a small bundle of clothing slung on a stick over his shoulder. He greeted some of the men and women as children and called them by the names they bore in childhood. When inquiry was made as to where he had been, he replied that he had been to France, and a strange and troubled look came upon his face. Realizing that mystery clouded his past, they refrained from questions, and Cameron, after lingering in the village a short time, continued his journey to the little farm formerly occupied by his parents. The present holders of the place he regarded as interlopers, and

so vigorously did he protest against their usurpation that the farmer was upon the point of setting the dog to drive away one whom he thought either drunk or crazy.

The minister, who was one of Duncan's classmates in college, chanced to learn in the village of the mysterious return of his old friend, and followed him immediately to the Cameron homestead, arriving just in time to rescue Duncan from the indignity and danger with which he was threatened. Through the exercise of considerable tact, the Rev. Mr. Purdee induced Duncan to return with him to the manse, and after a few days of careful watching and the giving of many evasive answers to the questions asked, Cameron was brought to understand that great changes had taken place in the time spent by him in France. He became entirely tractable, and upon expressing a desire to be permitted to live in his old home, arrangements for his care were made with the McLouths, who held the farm. In the weeks that followed, he became quite accustomed to his surroundings.

Before they saw Cameron, Mr. and Mrs. Fisher and Mrs. Wheeler held long conferences with the Rev. Mr. Purdee and Dr. William Ross, the local practitioner. Dr. Ross was absent at the time of Cameron's appearance, and did not reach Dunoon until the same day that saw the arrival of Mr. Fisher and the ladies. When all the facts had been told

him, he was asked if it were probable that anything could be done to restore the reason of the man in whom they were so greatly interested.

“Of course that may be determined only after examination and a careful study of the case,” said Dr. Ross. “We do not know what has caused his loss of memory. When Mrs. Wheeler met Cameron in Paris, he recognized her, as he did her husband; so we may conclude that he was in normal mind until he met with the injury in the encounter referred to by the French woman in her letter to Mrs. Wheeler. This injury may have been a blow upon the head, causing either a slight fracture or a depression of the skull and resulting in a pressure upon the brain. If the latter, time may effect a cure; or it may be necessary to resort to surgery. Very remarkable instances of recovery from injury of this nature are reported, and this one promises to be as full of interest as any of them. If his general health is good, I do not believe that Cameron’s condition is entirely hopeless.”

“Do you think, Doctor, that if Cameron were brought face-to-face with these friends of more recent years, or should see his wife and daughter and the familiar sights around his home in America, that his memory would return?” asked the minister.

“Probably not at first. But to venture an opinion before I have seen Duncan and learned more about

his condition would be like a leap in the dark," replied Dr. Ross.

Mr. Fisher could not believe that Cameron would fail to know him at sight. "I want to walk right up to him and say, 'Duncan Cameron, here's an old neighbor, Arad Fisher, come to take yours home to yours' wife and daughter Agnes, and to stand by with his last penny till yours git back with interest what the Cygnet Oil Company stole from yours like a sneak. Shake!' I'll bet a dollar it'll bring him to his senses."

"Physically, he appears to be entirely well," said Mr. Purdee, "and as rugged and strong as ever. Do you think the trial Mr. Fisher proposed would do him any harm, doctor?"

"No; on the contrary, I would advise it, and I wish to be present and note the effect."

It was arranged that the four should drive out to the McLouth place, Mrs. Fisher remaining in the village, and they were soon upon their way. The road, for about two miles, led along the coast, and when it skirted the little bays and inlets which the waves had eaten in the land, like irregular teeth of a gigantic saw, they came frequently upon groups of fishermen who were landing with the catch of the forenoon. As they neared the McLouth farm, which was all snugly tucked away in a little valley which swept back from the Firth with rapidly narrowing

sides until it ended in a rocky glen, they heard a shout, and the carriage was brought to a halt.

"Davie Purdee, Davie Purdee!" came the voice, "wait a bit and see the luck I have had with my fishing."

Looking in the direction of the voice, they saw Duncan running toward them, carrying a basket filled with cool, glistening fish which had recently come from the water.

"Ah, Duncan, lad," said Mr. Purdee, "we were on our way in search of you. Here are some old friends whom you will be glad to see."

Cameron paused as he neared the carriage, and into his face came a puzzled, wondering expression as he glanced from one to another.

"Old friends? I know none here except you, Davie. And yet—yes, is this not Willie Ross, from beyond Inverchaolin? Sure, it is Willie. But, lad, how is it you have grown a beard and come to look like a man, the same as Davie, here, and the same as I see myself when I look in a glass?" He stood a moment, looking wonderingly into the face of his old friend, and then turned to the minister with a pathetic gesture. "Davie, what does it all mean, lad? Why all this mystery?"

"What mystery, Duncan? I see nothing strange."

"Ah, but it is strange—everything is strange, and I cannot fathom the depths. Here am I a man, who was but a lad in the near past. You, Davie,

who were in college with me last year, now of family and the parson of the kirk in town. Willie Ross, a wee runt with a freckled face, comes out the next spring looking like another parson, or a doctor. Everybody has grown old in a few weeks. Bairns whom I do not know are calling 'faither' and 'mither' to lads and lasses with whom I was familiar just anon. The old town has changed; the buildings have grown older with all the rest, but a few new ones have come suddenly into existence beside the familiar ones. What—what does it mean? Tell me, Davie—or you, Willie Ross, tell me, if you would not have me go daft with the weight of it."

There was piteous pleading in his voice and manner; a note of despair in his accents. Mr. Fisher turned his head to hide the tears that coursed down his cheeks. Mrs. Wheeler leaned back in the carriage, white and silent, her face tender and beautiful with the great pity that welled up from her heart.

Dr. Ross stepped from the carriage and took Cameron's hand.

"You tell me about it, Duncan, lad," said the doctor as he gently urged Cameron to sit on a moss-covered rock and then took his place beside him and twined his arm over Duncan's shoulder. "I have just come back to Dunoon from a month's stay in a London hospital, and I have not heard your story, Duncan. Tell it, lad."

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHERE ARE THE VANISHED YEARS?

CAMERON looked about him as though attempting to collect his thoughts. His eyes for a moment rested upon Mr. Fisher, and those who were watching expected he would speak; but he shook his head sadly and murmured to himself.

"And will you help me, Willie Ross, to clear something that is clouding my mind?" he asked suddenly.

"Aye, that I will, Duncan, if it is in my power. And these here will help you, for each one has something to say after you have told all you can remember."

"It was this way," he began. "I recall that for a long time I felt great heaviness upon my head. I could not throw it off, nor could I awaken from a sleep that held me so closely that I knew nothing of my surroundings—only the weight that crushed me down. Then, after what seemed to be the lapse of years, the weight decreased—slowly at first, but in time more rapidly until all at once I made a mighty effort and broke loose from it in a moment.

"I found myself sitting upright on a couch in a large room with a low ceiling and the floor littered with household utensils which I never before had seen. Everything was unfamiliar; I was clad in a night-robe that was not my own; beside the couch was a stand upon which there were some glasses of medicine; there was a bandage upon my head which was wet with some lotion.

"I thought myself in a dream, for when I had gone to bed I was here in my home with my father and mother, and it was the school vacation of the summer. In the evening before there had been a great storm and the lightning was most vivid. I sat with my father on the little porch, the rain splashing upon our bare feet, when there came a blinding flash and a loud report at the same instant. The stool upon which I sat was thrown over and I fell, almost insensible, upon the edge of the floor where the rain from the eaves was dashing in my face. My father dragged me within the house and, with my mother's help, for I was weak and could aid them little, they carried me to my room and put me to bed. By-and-by as they sat watching and asking me constantly if I was comfortable, I fell asleep and remember nothing else until the weight of which I told you came upon my head—and then the strange room and the unfamiliar surroundings.

"I put my hand to my face in wonderment and felt a beard growing upon the cheeks of a lad in

his teens. I gazed upon my hands and they were those of a man who had toiled, and not those of a school-boy. Upon my finger was this ring which I had never before seen and which bears the emblem of Freemasonry, an order which, surely, I never joined.

“My brain swam with dizziness, my throat was parched and husky, while over my body broke a perspiration that was as cold and clammy as the dew of death. I attempted to leap from the couch, but fell back with weakness.

“As I lay thus, half-unconscious, and wondering whether it were a dream or loss of reason, a man came to the couch and looked into my face. He was a stranger to me, and though he was rough and uncouth in appearance, he had a kindly manner and he placed his hand upon my head with tenderness.

“‘Ah, monsieur,’ he said to me in French, ‘you are improved and are once more yourself. Good, monsieur, we soon will have you up.’

“The French language, and still I understood what he said! How did I know his words? I was in my first term of French and scarcely knew the rudiments, and yet I replied to him in the same tongue by asking where I was and how I had come there.

“‘You are in the house of a peasant, monsieur, whom you may call Gaspard. You were brought here by two men who found you injured, I know not how, in a street in Paris. They were honest men, monsieur, and finding a stranger unconscious near

the Seine, they put you in their boat and brought you hence, fearing that you might fall a victim to foot-pads or robbers.'

"How long have I been here?"

"Since early morning, monsieur.'

"Do you know my name—who I am?"

"You are an American—an American named Cameron.'

"Yes, I am a Cameron,' I said at length, 'but not an American. Indeed, I have never seen America, for I am but a Scotch lad, and my home is at Dunoon, on the Firth of Clyde.'

"Then I am in error, monsieur. I have no information save that secured from papers in your pockets.'

"I asked that they be shown me, but the peasant said I must first take some nourishment, which he soon brought. After I had partaken of the gruel, toast and eggs, Gaspard placed a coat and waistcoat upon the couch and asked me if they were not mine. I shook my head, for I did not remember having seen them before.

"You wore them when brought here, monsieur.'

"They are not mine,' I told him. 'These garments are from the clothing of a man, while I am a mere lad. They are travel-stained and thread-bare, and have a strange make and texture not at all like our tweeds and homespuns.'

"I examined the papers which Gaspard took from

the pockets for my inspection. There was my name, and my writing, too, though that was grown cramped and angular like my body. Of their contents I knew nothing, for they were mostly memoranda of transactions about unheard-of things. One of them purported to be an account of the formation of a co-partnership between Duncan Cameron and one Eli Wheeler to carry on the business of mining and refining oil upon a tract of land known as the Cameron farm. Large sums of money and capital stock are mentioned, but nothing is said as to the source from which the oil is to be secured, or what kind of oil is to be produced and refined. The other papers are equally as perplexing, for they mention persons, places and factors of which I have no knowledge.

"But the most mysterious thing of all, Willie Ross, is that the numerous dates which the papers bear are years in the future! Noticing this, I asked Gaspard the year and the day.

"'Monsieur, it is October eleventh, eighteen hundred and seventy-three,' he replied.

"'Eighteen hundred and seventy-three! Ah, my God, man, why do you deceive me?'

"'Monsieur, it is as I say. Be calm, for you have been very ill and your hurt is a dangerous one. It will all come right in time, all you have forgotten in your illness.'

"'Forgotten! Can one go to sleep a mere youth and then in some unexplained way live more than

twenty years, in which time he travels to foreign countries, amasses property, engages in great business transactions and then awakens to find himself in a peasant's house in France, able to converse in a tongue which he has not mastered, and having no knowledge of all that has intervened? It is not forgetfulness, Gaspard, it is insanity!"

"Gaspard turned quickly to the stand and was busy a moment with the medicines. He brought me a cup containing a cool, sweet draught and asked me if I was not thirsty. I drank, and though I attempted to continue the conversation, I could frame but a few sentences before I sank to sleep."

Cameron rose and paced up and down the path several times. They said nothing to him, though Dr. Ross watched him narrowly and with anxiety. When he resumed his place beside the doctor, he continued:

"I remember that in my sleep there came a horrid nightmare. Before me lay a wide, deep and ragged crevasse, spanned by a single moss-covered trunk of a tree that some time had been thrown down by a storm. Upon the opposite side were two women who appeared to be in deep trouble, and who were endeavoring by signs to make me realize a danger which I could escape only by coming quickly to them. One was a matron, fair and lovely, even in her distress, and with that in her face that told me it was my little schoolmate and sweetheart, Alice Laing, and about whom none in Dunoon has told me aught since my

return. Her companion was much younger, a beautiful girl just turning to womanhood, who with her eyes and outstretched hands implored me to leap upon the slender crossing and hasten to her side. I glanced above, and there upon the edge of an overhanging crag crouched a man, holding poised beside him an immense rock which with one push of his hand would crash down upon me with a force that meant instant death. I attempted to shout, but my tongue was as a clod and made no sound. I braced myself to leap as far upon the narrow path as possible, but stood as one whose muscles had turned to unbending iron.

“He saw my distress—the man there beside the swaying rock—and laughed at my helplessness. In pantomime he showed me how easily he could send the cruel missile down upon me. He clenched his teeth and a gleam came into his eyes that told me he would wait no longer—but still I could not move from the spot in which I stood.

“There was a loud crash—in the twinkling of an eye the scene changed and I was upon the couch in the low room in the peasant’s house and two men were struggling upon the floor. One was Gaspard, whom I knew—the other was the man who an instant before seemed to stand above me on the crag, ready to hurl upon my head a weight which I could not escape.

“It was a satisfaction to see him beaten into sub-

The Spotter.

mission and pinioned by Gaspard, for the nightmare still possessed me and my fear of the man was overpowering. I was asked by the Frenchman if I recognized his prisoner and I replied that I did not. I wanted him out of my sight and did not tell of my dream.

“There is little more to add, Willie. How long I remained at the peasant’s house, I do not know. Gaspard was with me constantly and gave me every care. He walked with me each day in an orchard, talking ever of France, the downfall of Napoleon III, the Commune, the establishment of a Republic, and many things which happened, he declared, in the years immediately preceding. He gave me little opportunity to think upon my own affairs and the strange condition in which I found myself, and I became strong and well. There were other persons at the house, but I saw them only at a distance. One day Gaspard asked me if I desired to return to my home, and I told him that I did, if he would help me to do so, as I had no means with which to make the journey.

“‘Monsieur is free to go,’ he replied, ‘and will be provided with money if he feels that his strength is sufficient for travelling. Yes. and I will accompany him upon his way.’

“I made the effort to thank him, but he replied that thanks were not due. My case, he said, had excited the sympathy of some wealthy men who had learned

of the circumstances, and they would provide what was necessary. He brought me new clothing and more money than I had ever before seen. He came with me as far as Edinburgh, and when I pressed him at last to tell me something that would enlighten me as to my past life, he said: 'Monsieur, I know little or nothing to tell, except that fate, who was once kind, seems to have turned her face from you for the present. Do not think upon your condition; live in the open air where you may gain strength, and ever hold to the hope that some day it will all come right.'

"Gaspard left me then and I came here, to be overwhelmed in wonderment over the changes which press upon me at every turn; to tread a path so intricate and mysterious that I find no straight course to lead me to a solution of the problem of my life. A boy, with memories of childhood and youth clustering around me and with no recollection of how I came to manhood, save fleeting visions which I cannot hold and which have no tangible or cohesive sequence. They sometimes for a moment flash upon my brain, and then as quickly vanish, leaving me to grope in darkness and to pray for their return. And yet a man in stature, strength and age, as they who were my companions but a summer ago are now men and women.

"Ross, in the mercy of God, tell me what has happened," and Cameron fell upon his knees before

them. "Or you, Davie Purdee, my boyhood friend; or this stranger here, with the kindly face, which I seem to know as though I had met it in a dream; or this beautiful young woman, who has so much sympathy in her eyes that her heart must be as tender as the heart of a wee lassie—tell in a word what you must call this cloud that rests upon my life! Where are the years which vanished between the night when I was struck down by the lightning and the day I awoke in the house of the French peasant? Was I insane through them all, and did I pass them in some madhouse; or was I then sane and have I now gone mad?

"See, Ross, Purdee, all—can you look with indifference to the pleading of one who prays to you from his knees as he would to his God?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

BETSEY PAINTS A PICTURE.

THE Rev. Mr. Purdee and Dr. Ross stepped forward and raised Cameron to his feet. Mrs. Wheeler covered her face with her hands and sobbed convulsively. Mr. Fisher's furrowed face was as colorless as the hair that crowned it, and he appeared to be on the point of breaking out in a denunciation of the great wrong which had been committed against his friend.

"Calm yourself, Duncan, lad," said Dr. Ross in a tone he might be expected to use to a nervous child. "We are here to help you and to make all clear. You have not been, nor are you now insane. Through an injury, as the peasant whom you call Gaspard declared, you lost consciousness, and when it returned a number of years of active life had dropped from your memory. With God's help and in His own good time, that memory will come again."

"Davie!" and Cameron caught Mr. Purdee's arms and looked him straight in the eyes, "is this true?"

"It is true, Duncan, as true as the sun yonder; as true as the mercy and love of God."

"Twenty-five years, is it not! The memory lost of twenty-five years! Ah," and he glanced quickly from one to another of those around him, "should I desire its return? Is there something in that long period—from youth to middle age—which I have done and now do not know, but which, returning to me, would make me ashamed?"

"No!" thundered Mr. Fisher, coming up and taking Cameron's hand. "No, Cameron, not one single act."

The bewildered man looked upon Mr. Fisher with that curious gaze, of half recognition overshadowed with doubt, which one unconsciously assumes when circumstances arise which partially recall an elusive incident or bring back the features of a long-forgotten face.

"Thank you, sir. From whom does this assurance come?"

"From an old friend, Cameron—one who knows even more of your life than these companions of your youth. I lived beside you many years as a neighbor in Cameron Valley—Arad Fisher."

"And what Mr. Fisher tells you is known to very many," said Mrs. Wheeler, coming to Cameron's side and taking his hand. "Do you not know me, Mr. Cameron—the little girl whom you taught so many things and who was a playmate of your daughter Agnes?"

"My daughter—Agnes!"

He reeled and would have fallen had not Dr. Ross caught him quickly and supported him to a seat on the rock. Mrs. Wheeler, pale with fright, sank down by Cameron's side.

"Oh, forgive me; I ought not to have spoken so abruptly, but for the moment I forgot that we have not told you all. There is a daughter, Mr. Cameron, a beautiful, noble girl; just a few years younger than myself and with never a thought from the beginning of a year to its end except to make others happy."

"Her—her mother! Quick, girl, tell me—has this Agnes, my daughter, a living mother?"

"Why of course she has, Mr. Cameron; the dearest, sweetest mother that one can imagine—kind, loving, indulgent, unselfish—a guide and companion to her daughter, a friend to every one in need."

Cameron's face was a study. Astonishment, surprise, perplexity, wonder, fear, and finally, joy, swept over his countenance in alternating waves of light and shadow. Tears started to his eyes and he extended his arms as if in supplication.

"Is it Alice Laing? Davie, is it Alice Laing? Oh, for the love of Heaven, tell me, is it Alice?"

"Yes, Duncan, it is Alice Laing."

"Thank God; thank God; thank God! I feared I had lost her, for when I came back and found all so changed I dared not ask for Alice. There were strangers in her old home, and I would not let them

guess my secret, so made no inquiry. I searched everywhere, except in the kirkyard, and that I shunned. I listened, hoping, yet fearful that some one would speak her name. I haunted the place, where we wandered as boy and girl, recalling her pretty ways and feeling her dear presence; yet with each happy hour thus brought back, came the crushing thought and overshadowing fear that Alice had gone out of my life. And yet you tell me, friends, that she has been—is now—my wife, and that she has borne me a daughter?"

"Yes, Duncan, it is so. Alice went to America with her parents, both of whom died soon after reaching there. Upon learning this, you followed immediately and were married in a few weeks."

Cameron buried his face in his hands and wept with joy. His body swayed with emotion, and those who stood beside him saw that he was wrought upon by intense nervous excitement. No word was spoken, and after a few minutes he raised his head and looked afar off upon the blue water of the Firth with a gaze of deep and intense inquiry.

"Almost!" he whispered. "The picture of the past almost comes to me. Oh, help me to bring it back."

"Quick," said Dr. Ross. "Tell him some dramatic, thrilling incident of his life."

Mr. Fisher shook his head helplessly and glanced toward Mrs. Wheeler. She stepped forward, laid her hand on Cameron's shoulder, and pointing toward

the gray and rugged Scottish landscape she drew this picture :

“There lies a beautiful valley, and here is a farm, the well-tilled fields of which have been brought from a state of neglect into a condition of fruitfulness and plenty. Here runs the road, and there on a little rise, is a comfortable, homelike farmhouse, hedged in with currant and small fruit shrubs, and filled with beds and rows of growing vegetables. Back of the house a rolling field stretches away to the wooded hill, and in it, first, an orchard, all pink-and-white in blossoms; and then a great meadow upon which the rich grass is even now glistening with different shades of green as the light wind sweeps across it. Off at the right is a smooth pasture leading up the gentle hill to the woodland, and upon which a herd of splendid cattle are grazing on the fresh pasturage.”

She spoke in a deep, low voice, without hesitation, and Cameron followed her description with an attention that indicated that it was making upon him a tremendous impression.

“Two girls are seated in a swing in the yard. A man comes from the garden and passes a corner of the house where they can see him, while a great collie, called Don, leaps from the sod and runs forward with joyful bark to greet his master.

“‘Father,’ says one of the girls to the farmer, ‘please take Betsey and me up to the Edgert tract to see them torpedo the well.’

"The man pauses. A new industry is being developed in all that section and the land of most of his neighbors has been leased for the purpose of drilling upon it wells for the production of oil. Within a few weeks an invention has been announced by which the flow of oil from the wells may be increased. A great can of nitro-glycerine is lowered to the bottom of the well and then exploded by a weight that is let fall upon it from the top. The explosion breaks up the rock at the bottom and opens new reservoirs of the product, thus giving a greater supply. The invention has not been tried in this neighborhood, and upon the success of the experiment to-day depends the sale of a neighbor's farm at a price that will raise him from poverty to riches. The whole community is interested and curious, and the girls plead that they be taken to witness the sight. The man consents to go if the mother of one of the girls may be induced to accompany them, and the girls run into the house, to return in a moment, their arms around the beautiful woman whom one calls mother.

"Back through the meadow and orchard they troop, three of them decking their hair and bosoms with sprays of apple-blossoms and bunches of violets—the man gravely amused over their play and listening to their chatter with kindly interest. On through the wood lot where the big maples stand, which a few weeks before were dripping their flow of sweet sap

into troughs and buckets, over fences, through a wild lot given up to a tangle of bushes, and finally out into the clearing where a great derrick of rough boards stands seventy feet in the air above the oil well.

"A crowd of sightseers has assembled. Most of them are known to the man and they come around him with many questions, seeking his opinion concerning the invention. Before he has time to answer, there is a warning from the derrick to stand back out of danger, and some drillers and torpedo men approach with a long tube of tin filled with a dangerous explosive. Carefully they convey it to the well, and with great caution lower it gently through the mouth of the casing.

"Two men slowly pay out the rope as the tremendous charge sinks foot by foot into the earth. Two other men stand by the casing, one guiding the rope in the center of the well and the other listening for any sound from the depths below. A hundred feet—two hundred—a thousand feet of the slender line has been uncoiled, and still the torpedo sinks, deeper and deeper into the black and narrow hole. Twelve hundred feet! The men, women and children gather near in breathless, silent interest, for they see no danger now. Fifteen hundred feet of the line has disappeared, and there are two hundred feet remaining when the man who has been listening all this time over the casing, raises his hand.

"He feels a puff of gas upon his cheek—faint and almost imperceptible. The drillers stop paying out rope and stand immovable. A low-spoken word or two by the men is not heard by the people, who are crowding to the sides of the derrick.

"Another puff of gas, stronger than before, comes into the now white faces of the men.

"'God! she is going to flow! Back, back!' shouts one of the drillers, and as they drop the line the four men leap among the people and run for their lives.

"A startled, fearful cry from those who press around the narrow platform—a panic struggle for flight which results in throwing many to the ground and keeping all save the strongest from reaching safety! A rushing, hissing sound from the mouth of the well!

"A man—this owner of the peaceful farm—leaps upon the derrick platform and stands crouching near the iron casing. Men shout, women scream, children scramble to their feet and flee in terror—but he heeds them not. The rush of gas grows louder, for the subterranean reservoir has broken open of its own pent-up force and the torpedo is being driven upward like a shot, to be thrown into the air and fall to the ground with an explosion that will kill a score of people. Some faint; others stand rooted to the spot, paralyzed with the fascination of approaching death.

"In a flash the glistening tube leaps upward, and the man, watching its flight twenty feet above his

head, springs forward as it falls and, reaching up on tip-toe, with arms cushioned to receive it, catches the awful missile and bears it gently up from striking ground or timbers!

“A mighty shout; a roar of gas; a thick stream of black, liquid spurting high above the derrick and raining upon all with stifling odor and pelting flood, does not stop this man who has saved so many lives. Blindly, carefully, he creeps forward with his burden of death until other men come to his side and take it from his arms.

“Mr. Cameron, do you not recognize the picture?”

One hand was clasped over his eyes, the other extended before him.

“Yes, yes—I see it all! Cameron farm—my home—Sam Edgert, Jim Tubbs, Arad Fisher, Old Don, Agnes, Betsey—Alice! Oh, thank God, thank God!”

The vanished years came rushing back as the scenes of a day before return to the awakened sleeper!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

DOCTOR ROSS SELLS OUT.

ONE afternoon a month later, the Rev. David Purdee pushed open the door and entered Dr. Ross's office.

"What is this I hear, Ross; that you have offered your practice for sale and intend to go to America?"

"Yes, it is true, dominie."

"But, man, are you not contented with what you are doing here? They tell me that you are riding night and day and have been called in consultation as far away as Garrows and Holten."

"I have no complaint to make of the practice; but it has been for sale."

"Been? Then you have reconsidered your plan and have withdrawn it?"

"No; I have sold out."

The minister looked at him curiously for a moment from under perplexed eyebrows. "I don't understand it, Willie. Why should a man with your brilliant prospects wish to throw them aside and go abroad, where he must again commence at the bottom of the ladder?"

Doctor Ross smiled, and without speaking stepped to the locker and mixed two glasses of strong Scotch whiskey. "There's an uncomfortable chill in the air this afternoon, Davie," he said, bringing the drinks forward, "and I have to start on a long ride in a few minutes, so I'll ask you to join me in something warming, and at the same time to drink to my success."

"That I will of course do, Willie, and pray for it as well. But I can't see why you should put aside that which is already successful to enter upon a venture which is doubtful."

"Do you remember the day out on the shore, Davie, when Cameron was so strangely restored to his full reason?"

"To be sure I do, for it is almost never out of my thoughts. And that reminds me—I have here a letter from Duncan telling about his arrival home. I brought it over for your reading; it is as much to you as to me."

The doctor took the letter somewhat eagerly. "Let me keep it and read it later."

"Certainly; that was my intention."

"And do you remember the little woman, Davie, who told the thrilling story about Cameron's heroism which shocked him into consciousness?"

The minister nodded absently. "Yes, Mrs. Wheeler."

"It is she that is taking me to America."

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The Rev. Mr. Purdee's hand with the half-emptied glass paused on its way to his lips for a sip of the fragrant liquor. Slowly it sank until the glass rested upon the table, and the men looked each other in the eyes.

"Willie Ross!"

"Yes, Davie, it is so. You are my minister as well as my friend. This is my confession."

"Why man, do you know that the woman is married?"

"That I do, to my regret. Had she not been, she would have stayed here as my wife, or I should have accompanied her home as her husband."

"You crazy dolt! Have you said anything to her of this?"

"Davie!" reproachfully.

"Ah, but I don't know. When a Scotchman is in love neither honor nor dishonor, nor the commands of God, nor the fear of the devil stand in his way. Did you let her know during the days they remained here that you were smitten?"

"No, not by one word—except——"

"Except what, man? Tell me the whole of it, if you are making your confession."

"When we bade them good-by on the steamer, and you were talking and laughing with the others, she gave me her hand in farewell. I held it firmly in my grasp a moment, and said to her: 'This is for a time, only. I am coming to America.' She looked

at me with unspoken words on her lips. Then she turned away and was silent for a moment, at last saying that she thought my place was here where I have opportunities to do so much good."

"And she was right. Losh, but the woman has the greater wisdom of the two, and no doubt she thinks you the crazy loon that you are. What can come to you by following her? Only heartburnings and disappointments."

"Nevertheless, I shall go."

"Yes, I suppose you will, for you were ever the most headstrong lad in the country. You will go to find that when she told you to remain in Scotland, she gave you good advice. From Duncan and Mr. Fisher I had some of Mrs. Wheeler's history, and barring the fact that she temporarily lost her head when her parents suddenly became wealthy, and was flattered into marrying a man more than twice her own age, she has been a sensible girl and woman. She is tied to a scoundrel, I will grant; but have you stopped to consider that she may not be freed from him in a lifetime?"

"Then by neither word nor look shall she or any other know that I love her, for I will carry my secret in silence. Something has told me from the start, Davie, that there would be a sequel to the chapter in the life of this woman in which I have part, and that in some manner I must be a factor in writing that sequel."

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“In other words, without invitation or request, you are to become a modern Don Quixote, and are going out to fight battles for those who do not wish your services. No good will ever come of it, my boy, and if you but keep the sea between yourself and the object of your romantic fancies you will be happier, and will soon laugh over these dreams.”

Ross shook his head. “It is too late, Davie, too late. The fancy as you call it has laid hold on me and I would not have it let go. I leave this day week. Will you not drink to my success?”

The minister took the glass and slowly extended it until it touched the one held by his friend. Tears stood in his eyes, and in a broken voice he said:

“To your success, Willie Ross—in your profession.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. TUBBS IN BUSINESS.

THE great suit of *Cameron vs. The Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company* had been dragging its tiresome way through the courts for more than two years, and was not yet at the end. Times almost without number it made its appearance in one form or another, only to be delayed upon various pretexts until the public nearly lost sight of the contest and no longer expected a determination of the issue within the memory of one generation. The policy of the Cygnet Company appeared to be delay, and as the courts in some subtle manner were held under influences exerted by the powerful interests of the Cygnet, it was not a difficult matter for the adroit and well-paid lawyers for the defendants to get such postponements and adjournments as they might desire. A simple motion for a change of venue, for instance, was argued on four different occasions about three months apart, and then the learned judges took another three months to reach a decision, from which an appeal was immediately interposed.

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"Tire them out and break them down," was the laconic order issued by President Lanphere when the suit was brought. It appeared as though this would be the result.

The plaintiff sought to show that through a conspiracy, "existing between John Lanphere, President of the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company, and one Eli Wheeler, the lands and certain sums of cash owned by Duncan Cameron had been wrongfully and fraudulently seized, converted, and were now held to the use and benefit of the said Company, and that the said Cameron had not been paid any just compensation for the same."

The defense set up the claim that the property had been purchased in good faith from Wheeler, who held deeds of the same, and was authorized under power of attorney to transact business for the Cameron Farm Company, and to buy and sell for the said company.

So rapid and sure was the growth of the Cygnet's power throughout the oil regions that the independents who suffered with Cameron when Wheeler sold them out became cowed and disheartened and had little inclination to give him either aid or encouragement. Indeed, some of them were now holding positions of one kind or another with the Cygnet, and they conveniently forgot about the transactions of several years before, not being inclined to jeopardize what they already held in the doubtful effort to prove

that the President of the Cygnet had ruined them through a conspiracy with Wheeler. The very good Mr. Lanphere could not be guilty of such an act. It was no secret that he wanted the independent refineries and the Cameron property. What man among them would not buy out dangerous opposition when the opportunity presented? It was a legitimate move in trade and could not be criticised. Lanphere was not to blame; Wheeler was the scapegoat. He had gone to the good Mr. Lanphere, admitted that he was tired and discouraged with his efforts to buck the Cygnet, confessed that he was at the end of his financial leash, and offered the properties for sale. Wheeler was the man to prosecute; Wheeler was the liar, the swindler, the thief. Find Wheeler and they would give their last dollar to bring him to complete justice—but the good Mr. Lanphere could not be blamed.

Thus they argued, and so it fell out that Cameron found himself fighting the battle alone and in the face of many discouragements.

The first of these was his lack of money. Cameron came home to find that his wife and daughter were occupying with Mr. and Mrs. Tubbs the cottage in which he had installed them in Bradan. Mrs. Cameron knew many womanly arts, and with her ready adaptability found opportunity to employ them to an extent which yielded a considerable revenue. Agnes, grown into beautiful womanhood, gave instruction in

music, and for the past year no social function had been complete without the benefit of her professional presence. Mr. Tubbs—happy old Jim, who, now that his daughter and Cameron were safely home, was the most contented and well satisfied man on earth—confided to Cameron that he was making more money matching horses and selling the teams in the oil country to lucky producers than “could be made out of a half-dozen twenty-barrel wells.”

“You’re going to take every dollar of it,” he declared when Cameron told of his plan to bring suit against the Cygnet, “and when that’s gone there’ll be more ready for ye. Besides a little better than seven-teen hunder in the bank, there’s”—and his voice sank to a whisper—“that two thousand that I salted, and nobody to this day knows anything about it but us two. I never’ll want it, Mr. Cameron, for since I got into business and out of society, I can make money hand over. Cleaned up a hunder and eight yesterday, and now that my reputation is gettin’ up, can make two hunder a month above expenses as easy as talkin’ politics. It comes natural to me to speculate in hosses, and since I’ve got speeded up to a safe gait there ain’t no other hossman passed me. I started in with a fifty-dollar mare that I got by selling some of the duds and jimcracks they bought for me when we soared, and now I’ve got over in that barn four thousand dollars’ wuth of hosses and rigs, besides what I’ve told you of. Ain’t that a good

stroke for an old duffer what didn't know enough to shine in a plug hat and swaller tail coat?"

"Indeed it is, Mr. Tubbs. It is an achievement of which any man might be proud. You do not know how greatly it pleases me. And to see Mrs. Tubbs so contented, too. She appears most happy."

"Happy! why there ain't a happier soul than Mis Tubbs in the State, unless it is Mis Cameron, now that you're home. And it was so durin' all the dark days when never a word came from Betsey, the poor little gal whose head was turned, but whose heart was right all the time. Mis Tubbs never mourned a minnit for the money after she picked up the stitches she dropped when the crash come and the whole web of rosy colors she'd been weavin' fell out of her hands.

" 'James,' she says, comin' up to me one day after you left us, 'do you suppose you can forgive me?' 'Susan,' says I, 'what have you been doin', breakin' some of them chiney dishes mother gin us as a weddin' present?'

" 'You know what I'm askin' forgiveness for, James,' she replied.

" 'There ain't nothin' else in the world for which you'd have to ask forgiveness, except to break them five or six pieces of chiney.' "

"She looked at me out of the corners of her eyes just as she used to when we went to dances together

before she was Mis Tubbs—but I was as sober as a hungry cow and didn't change an eyebrow.

"'James,' she said after a minnit, 'if you really mean it, I ain't goin' to say any more about it. If anybody'd told me three years ago that I could have been such a silly old hen—well, I'd a tied a sunbonnet on my head to keep my senses from gettin' out. Now that I've come to my right mind once more, I'm goin' to work and make you as happy as you've been miserable. And when Betsey's back with us—for she'll come, James, as sure as summer follows winter, and come in her right mind, too—the place where we live will be about as near like home as any spot on earth—no matter if it's in a shanty.' "

Mr. Tubbs turned away, for there was a fulness in his throat that made his speech difficult. In a moment he abruptly changed the subject:

"You can have all I've saved, Mr. Cameron, to fight Lanphere."

"I do not want it, Mr. Tubbs, though I thank you for the offer. I thought of borrowing five hundred dollars from Mr. Edgert, and if you will loan me the same sum, I will give a note, and if I live it will be paid."

"You can't borrow any money from me. I'm goin' to put the cash in your hand, and I won't take no note——"

"But, Mr. Tubbs——"

"No sir-ee; this is as much my fight as it is yours,

and though I don't want the money back that my high-flyin' son-in-law took out of the Tubbs family, I want to see you win out."

In the end, a thousand dollars was placed in the hands of young Harry Edgert, who had completed his studies and was now an active and progressive lawyer, and the fight was begun that made him famous for his persistency and resources, and gave the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company the hardest rub it ever experienced.

Cameron returned to the oil country in the vicinity of his old home with several objects in view. He would be upon the scene of action where without delay he could have frequent consultation with Harry, and by becoming managing superintendent of a producing tract he would earn a salary that would help him in the contest against a corporation possessed of unlimited means. Finally, here he might be able to secure some knowledge of the whereabouts of Wheeler. This much only was known of the missing man—it was reported that he had been seen in Oleford several times, and it was supposed that he was engaged in some secret work for the Cygnet.

CHAPTER XXX.**THE SPOTTER.**

IN ALL eras of industrial development, necessary inventions keep pace with the increased demands which are constantly presenting themselves.

One of the outgrowths of the oil industry was the torpedo, or nitro-glycerine "shot," which was lowered to the oil-bearing rock and there exploded, breaking up the veins and pools containing the fluid and giving them free outlet to the chamber formed by the explosion and final vent through the mouth of the well above.

It was one of the early experiments with this invention which Mrs. Wheeler seized upon to describe, and thus reach and recall the fugitive memory of Duncan Cameron when they found him in Scotland. When Cameron returned to the oil regions and took up the work he was engaged to superintend, he found that next to drilling, the torpedoing of wells was a most important branch of the work. A thriving company controlled the patents and sought through the monopoly to enrich its stockholders by leaps and

bounds, rather than through the slower channels of more equitable dealing. The producers who wished to torpedo their wells were compelled to pay almost prohibitive prices for the privilege of so doing, though the cost of material and work was comparatively small. The producers were between two oppressive influences. On the one hand, the Cygnet, with the pipe lines, tankage, shipping facilities, railroad concessions and refineries in its control, fixed the price of oil at whatever figure its pleasure and love of profit might suggest. On the other hand, the Torpedo Company demanded a full pound of flesh for the permission to employ its devices to increase the flow of the wells.

The simplicity of the process, and the ease with which unauthorized torpedoes might be constructed invited constant, but not wholly inexcusable, infringement upon the rights of the patent-owners. Thus there grew up a body of "moonshiners"—men who for one-half or a third of the sum demanded by the Torpedo Company, would "shoot" a well, generally at night, without warrant of authority. So common became this illicit practice that regular organizations of the moonshiners were formed. Agents manufactured the explosive in distant localities; others, in wagons fitted with specially prepared springs and covers, conveyed loads of the product to the vicinity of the wells, where scores of reckless and daring men, carrying knapsacks each containing several cans of

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the death-dealing liquid, went abroad over the hills and mountains at night through almost impassable trails in great tracts of woodland, each with his object in view and bent upon its accomplishment. They generally operated in pairs, but many times one man would take the contract to surreptitiously torpedo several wells.

Now it must not be thought that the Torpedo Company suffered the work of the moonshiners to go on without protest and made no attempt to check it. Injunctions, complaints, suits for damages, arrests, writs and prosecutions clogged the courts and almost blocked the wheels of justice. In the furtherance of these proceedings, every possible subterfuge was employed to secure evidence against those who offended.

It was a wild country. Towns which grew in a night vanished in a month. The population was a floating one. Titles and ownership of many lands were obscure. The conditions of to-day were obliterated to-morrow. As compared with the customary progress of a community, it was guerilla scouting and attack contrasted with the orderly march of highly-drilled armies and the pitched battle upon the open plain. The authorities were often powerless and always indifferent.

The Torpedo Company employed to do its detective work men who came to be known as "spotters." They followed almost every known calling and frequented the oil exchanges, the hotels, the theatres, the broth-

els, and the gambling joints. They went abroad as drillers, tool-sharpeners, rig-builders, pumpers, teams-terers, or what not. Some of them seldom saw the light of day, but prowled about at night, skulking up to the wells, trailing the footsteps of the moonshiners, eaves-dropping upon well-owners, seducing into low resorts men from whom they desired information, and there plying them with liquor. They paid few visits to headquarters, making their reports in cipher and concealing them in designated places whence they were secured by others and conveyed to the chief—a dignitary who moved about from place to place and who never appeared in the prosecutions, but whose duty it was to discover through his band of “spotters” evidence of such violations as he could, and then give the information to those who carried on the open work of legal attack.

Though the calling of the spotter may have been a wholly honorable and necessary one, those who pursued it in the oil regions were hated with the same intensity that is poured out upon the informer against an illicit still in the mountains of Tennessee. He was called a sneak, an underhanded villain, a black-mailer, a spy in the interests of oppressive tyrants, a creature who crawled upon you while you slept. It was not a serious matter in the eyes of many if a party of drillers caught him, beat him into insensibility, rolled him in crude petroleum and dirt, and then threw him into a stream to crawl out, or sink,

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as might happen. It was not a crime that awakened horror and repugnance if the body of a spotter was found in the woods with a moonshiner's bullet through his head. Even those owners who paid their royalties to the company and had their wells torpedoed by licensed agents hated the spotter, and when discovered drove him from the premises with threats of violence should he return.

No man of character became a spotter. And what more natural than that he who had been the plotting and dishonest speculator, the fugitive and buncoed promoter, should become chief of the hated spotters?

Such was Eli Wheeler.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MOONSHINER.

DUNCAN CAMERON was proceeding from the group of wells which he designated as headquarters to a distant section of the tract where a gang of men were erecting new derricks. He was on horseback, picking his way along a rough road through the woods and thinking at that instant only of the warmth of the day, the bursting of the leaf-buds, the piping calls of birds, and the carpet of green springing up through the leaves of last Autumn, all gem-sparkled with flowers. Suddenly his horse leaped sidewise, almost unseating his rider, reared, wheeled and sprung forward. Cameron brought the animal to quick control, and looking for the cause of the fright, saw coiled, ready to strike, almost at the exact point where the horse was startled, a monster rattlesnake. The reptile uncoiled and glided toward him, and Cameron, slipping from the saddle, advanced. Like the flash of a whip-lash the coil reformed, but as the flattened head arose and drew back for the fatal leap, Cameron reached forward and by a sharp,

powerful blow from his riding whip paralyzed the squirming body as with a shock of electricity. Seizing a stone, he finished his work with one crushing blow. Shuddering, almost sickened, by the terror and revulsion that came over him at the sight of a reptile, Cameron stepped backward two or three paces and stood wiping his brow.

"There's a lot of them damned rattlers along this run."

Cameron turned in amazement. A few yards back upon the road a young man was holding Cameron's horse and by reassuring strokes of the hand and gentle words was quieting the animal's terror.

"Lucky, I was back here beside the road, Mr. Cameron, or you would have had a five-mile walk."

"Coon Tubbs!"

"Sure; just plain Coon to you every time. I've lost all my airs, Mr. Cameron. You can call me Coon without my getting mad now."

"But—but what are you doing here?"

"Watching you make the prettiest kill of a rattler I ever saw, and then catching your horse for you. I generally shoot 'em—the rattlers—when I dast, and jest now happens to be a time when I dassent. Next to a spotter they're the damndest, meanest critters on top of ground. Neither of them—spotters or rattlers—is safe to handle except at the end of a bullet."

"Why, Coon, you can't know how surprised I am to see you," and Cameron stepped forward and took

the young man by the hand. "I have been making all sorts of inquiries to learn something about you, and your father has been trying to find you for two years."

"Dad ain't the only one what's looking for me."

"You surely aren't in trouble again with the authorities, Coon?"

"No; jest with the spotters, that's all."

"You've been moonshining, then?"

"Well, I wouldn't care to say so before everybody, Mr. Cameron, but you are wheat, and so I won't deny the profession. I've been told you don't allow any of it on your tract, but I guess that, to come right down to it, you'll admit that moonshining is jest as honest as to hold an owner up for three hundred dollars for shootin' a well when the whole cost ain't more than fifty. And when it comes to spotting—why, moonshining is preaching and praying alongside that occupation."

"But how do you happen to be here, Coon? There's no work here, is there?"

"It's like this, Mr. Cameron: I've moonshined all over the regions, both upper and lower. I've shot wells in Shamburg, Venango, Pithole, Oleopolis, Bonanza Pool, and on every tract in the lower country, and the spotters never touched me. And I've been all over this region and shot wells at Derrick City, Lewis Run, Summit City, Big Shanty, Tuna, Tionesta, Kinzua and everywhere else, and they

The Spotter.

didn't catch me here. I've been backwards and forwards from one region to the other, and I've fooled them every time for two years. Well, about two months ago I got word that orders had been put out to bring me down, dead or alive, or else git off the job. Then things fell off, and for a month they let me have my own run. I almost thought that it was a false report, till one day I come to and found their damned slippery chief right at my heels. He had called off the whole force and set out to take care of me, himself, and sence that time he's give me a rustle for my money every hour. I ain't shot but three wells in a month on account of him, and so I slipped over here into an unsuspected tract to git him off the scent. I left him down near Pithole—flew the roost at night; but I don't think he's shook for good, and I've made up my mind to take a vacation over in York State."

"Who is this chief, Coon?"

"Why, don't you know, Mr. Cameron? He's that lying, thieving, sneaking slippery skunk of a brother-in-law of mine—Eli Wheeler—meaner than that rattler there; but the cutest damned spotter in Pennsylvania."

"Wheeler! Coon, do you say that Eli Wheeler is——"

P-i-n-g! There was a hot puff of air against Cameron's cheek and a sharp snap of something in Coon's right arm, and then the report of a rifle. Nerveless,

Coon's fingers unclasped from the bridle and his arm dropped and hung useless. With his uninjured hand he clutched his side, and to his lips and face came the pallor of sudden pain. He reeled and would have fallen had not Cameron bore him up.

"Coon—you are wounded!"

"Yes," throwing off the faintness that came upon him and crouching upon the ground. "It's Wheeler—quick, drop down here beside me or he'll plug you, too. Down, down Mr. Cameron, the bushes will give us some protection!" And he pulled Cameron to the ground beside him.

"Got a shooter? No, well take one of mine—I can't use but one hand anyway. Now watch out for him through the bushes there, and fire if you see a shadow or a moving branch. I'll watch the rear and this side, for some of his gang may be with him. Damn his hide, he's got us in a pocket and may bring us both down."

"Are you hurt badly, Coon?"

"I don't know, and I don't care if I only get one shot at Wheeler. My arm is snapped and bleeding and I guess there's a hole in my side; but I can hang on for a time."

Cameron thrust the revolver into his pocket and moved over beside Coon.

"What are you going to do?"

"Dress your wounds as best I can."

"You musn't try it, Mr. Cameron. Wheeler'll creep up on us and shoot you."

"Then let him do it. I am not going to see you bleed to death. You can watch while I work."

With his knife Cameron cut away the sleeves of Coon's coat and shirt. He made a tourniquet of some of the strips of cloth and with this soon stopped the flow of blood. Then he cut and pulled away the clothing from the young man's side. He judged that the bullet had glanced along the ribs and was lodged somewhere in the back, but was not sure. The bleeding must be stopped, for Coon was growing weak. Cameron made a compress of his handkerchief and bound it in place upon Coon's side with another bandage. Every instant, Coon protested and urged Cameron to be on his guard, but the man gave no reply and worked as rapidly and freely as though danger had never been born.

Fifty yards away along the bank, Eli Wheeler, in the thick branches of a small hemlock, swore under his breath and twisted and pounded the lock of his rifle with his hands. The firing pin, rusted by exposure to storms and night, stuck in its place and the charging lever could not be worked. He dared not leave his place of concealment and approach within revolver range, for that would put him at disadvantage with those whom he sought to kill, and so each moment as he jerked nervously upon the lever the arm became more nearly useless.

The horse, cropping the sweet tops of bath and squirrel corn under the bushes, a few yards from where Coon lay pillowed on Cameron's coat with Cameron seated beside him, raised its head and whinnied.

"Some one is coming," said Coon, attempting to rise.

"Yes," said Cameron, gently holding the boy back, "but you lie still. I'll do the fighting if there's any to be done."

He listened intently a moment and then smiled. "It is all right, Coon. It is our teams with material for the new wells. We'll have help in a few minutes."

The men came on—four of them, with two loaded wagons, each drawn by four horses. But before they came to the side of the superintendent, Wheeler slipped from his hiding place and, skulking low, noiselessly ran up over the brow of the hill and disappeared. They found his rifle where he had dropped it near the foot of the hemlock, and then they knew how it was that Duncan Cameron had not been the victim of an assassin's bullet.

Hours later, when Coon Tubbs was lifted tenderly from the mattress of boughs that covered one of the wagons and was carried into Cameron's room in the little old farmhouse at headquarters and placed upon the bed, he was babbling the incoherent sentences of the fever-crazed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANXIOUS HOURS.

DOCTOR WILLIAM ROSS had been located in Bradan for somewhat over a year. The growth of his practice was by no means rapid, but as it increased a little each month he felt justified in saying in his letters to the Rev. Mr. Purdee that he "was making way." Since his arrival at Bradan, Dr. Ross had been most discreet and careful in his deportment, and there were none who guessed the real cause of his coming to America. He called each week upon Mrs. Cameron and Agnes, and became very friendly with Mr. and Mrs. Tubbs. When Cameron came home, as he did frequently to remain over Sunday, Dr. Ross was invited to take dinner with them. In this way he saw Mrs. Wheeler often; but he had solemnly promised the Rev. Mr. Purdee before he left Scotland, that neither by word nor by manner would he disclose to any one his love for the woman who had no right to accept his addresses, and the promise was kept.

Though her father protested and declared over and

over again that it was not necessary for her to do so, Mrs. Wheeler took active part in the work in which he was engaged. After some persuasion, Mr. Tubbs permitted her to open for him a regular set of account books, whereas heretofore he had made almost illegible memoranda of insignificant matters upon the walls of his office or on bits of paper, and "carried in his head" the greater transactions. She wrote his letters, kept account of stock, made trips into the country to procure supplies, and sometimes even purchased horses which were brought for sale when her father chanced to be away.

"Betsey's got better sense about a hoss than two-thirds o' the men," Tubbs would say. "She don't appear ter hev any scientific knowledge about 'em either; but w'en she looks at one an' draws a line over him, an' sorter sizes him up, she jest seems ter know how much he's wuth to a dollar. She jest looks right through 'em an' sees all thet ain't right, or all thet's sound an' val'able at er glance. Dum curious she couldn't hev exercised ther same judgment when thet dum—But here, I wasn't never goin' to say nothin' about thet any more."

The telegram which Doctor Ross received from Cameron just at the edge of evening read as follows:

"HEMLOCK RUN, May 16th.

"*Dr. William Ross, Bradan.*

"Have found Coon Tubbs. He is badly injured by

accident; gunshot wound. Come at once. Have Tubbs and Betsey come with you. Edgert will bring you from junction. DUNCAN CAMERON."

Ross hurried over to the sales-stables to acquaint Mr. Tubbs with the news, and was there met by Mrs. Wheeler, who informed him that her father had the day before gone to Canada to purchase horses and would not return for several days.

The doctor hesitated a moment and then said: "I have both good news and bad news for you—I hope more that is good than is bad. Shall I tell it?"

Into Betsey's mind flashed the thought that this man had something to tell about her husband—something that she would not like to hear from his lips. The doctor half-divined of what she was thinking.

"It is about your brother and comes from Cameron."

A quick gasp of relief. "Yes; what is it? Is he ill—in trouble?"

Ross handed her the message and she read it twice through.

"When can you go?"

"On the freight and passenger at 8:10."

"I will be at the depot and go with you," she replied, and turned away to give directions to the foreman.

As the way-freight slowly dragged its length up into the oil regions, stopping long periods at each sta-

tion to cut out or pick up cars and load or unload merchandise and supplies, Betsey and Doctor Ross talked little. She told the doctor how difficult it had been to induce her mother to stay at home, and how she finally succeeded in doing so by telling her that some one must remain to get a room ready to receive the injured boy and prepare against his coming. "Poor mother," she said, "is not strong enough for the trip, and she would have been too nearly worn out and too nervous to have been of assistance. But it grieved me to leave her there, for she pleaded so to see her boy. Do you believe, doctor, that a mother ever loses any of her love for a son—no matter how wild he may be, or what trouble he may fall into, or how completely he may desert her?"

"No; I think not—I hope not. It is too beautiful a love to be lost. It is next to God's love for man."

"It is God's love for man, manifested through the woman," she replied.

It was after midnight when they reached the junction. Edgert was waiting on the depot platform, for the way-freight was an uncertain quantity and ran wholly regardless of time schedule. He sent Mrs. Wheeler into the house while he went with Ross to bring out the team.

"She need not know it at present," he said to the doctor when they were hitching the horses to the

wagon, "but the shot that wounded Coon was fired by Wheeler."

"Her husband?"

"The same. He's a spotter for the Torpedo Company and has been after Coon for a month. It was a plain enough try at murder, only it can't be proved as no one saw him fire the shot."

"Monstrous! He ought to be brought to justice."

"There's nothing around here by that name since the Cygnet got its grip on the country. If Eli Wheeler ever gets all that's coming to him it will have to be through some other route than is furnished by the courts. Do you carry a gun?"

"No. I have never had occasion to."

"Well, you take this one. Put it in your overcoat pocket until we get away from the lights and then hold it in your hand ready for use all the way. It works by just pulling the trigger like this." And Edgert slipped the chamber out of the revolver and illustrated its action. "Betsey'll sit on the front seat with me, and you keep your eyes and ears open for the rear of the wagon. But don't you fire a shot unless you get a cue from me."

"What danger should there be, Mr. Edgert? I don't understand it."

"There mayn't be danger, and then again there may. Wheeler is somewhere in this section and probably has other spotters with him. He knows what's going on; he is a desperate chap, and under

cover of night may make us trouble. It is a solitary bit of road from here to Hemlock, and the men in the oil regions ain't all Sunday School boys. You just hold on to the butt of that gun, doctor, and though it may not do any good, it won't do any harm. And remember, too, that I've got another one just like it right here where its handy."

So they started away for a fourteen-mile drive through the night to Hemlock. The road lay for some distance alongside one of the railroads, and then turned to the right and wound up the side of the range of hills which separated the valleys. The hissing natural gas torches about the junction, reflected upon the low, dark clouds, gave for a time some light on their way, but as they mounted the rough, stony road and wound in and out crossing ravines that cut the mountain side into huge windrows, the darkness settled in upon them, and Ross, for the first time in his life, begun to realize the full meaning of solitude. Far back, he occasionally caught a glimpse of tiny specks of light, the glow of red and green signals along the railroad tracks, but, as he watched, they turned the sharp shoulder of the hill and even the cheery sparkle of the glow-worm lamps at the junction were hidden from view.

Mr. Edgert told Mrs. Wheeler briefly as they were driving away from the hotel that the messenger sent out by Cameron had hurried back with a few articles needed for her brother. He said nothing about the

accident, save that it had occurred some distance from headquarters, and that the wounded man had suffered greatly while they were carrying him to shelter. Then Edgert gave his whole attention to his horses and spoke only to caution or encourage the animals in the most difficult portions of the road.

The forest took on strange, gloomy, dark shapes. Blackened and denuded trunks, reaching above the second growth and seen dimly against the horizon, were uncouth and grotesque figures, with stunted, crooked arms flung widely out as if in fear. Clusters of small trees and tangled bushes became mysterious envelopes of darkness which might conceal either men or beasts of evil disposition. The sweep of the branches against their faces as they drove where underbrush crowded in upon the track, was the swish of lassoes thrown swiftly out or dangled overhead by unseen hands to catch them. The crunch and grind of the wagon tires upon the stones were murmuring protests against their progress. Frequently, the iron-shod feet of the horses, scraping upon the rocks which were everywhere, struck a flash of fire which was gone in so brief an instant that it scarcely left its impress. When the horses came to a halt for a breathing space, the solitude increased, for then the rasping of the wagon wheels, the sharp hoof-stroke and the squeaking of the harness leather was stilled, and only the hot, beating

breath of the laboring horses broke a stillness that was more impressive than the darkness.

They paused for a brief rest at the top of the hill before going down the other side. It was in a clearing, made years before by a great sweep of wind that tumbled down acres of timber, like so many match sticks.

"Why didn't you bring a lantern, Mr. Edgert?" asked Mrs. Wheeler.

"There's one in the wagon," he said, "under the back seat."

"Then why not light it? I could hold it over the side and it would be ever so much more cheerful."

"The light from it would be unsteady, and it would confuse the horses and make it harder for them to follow the road than it is now."

"Is that the only reason, Mr. Edgert?"

"Y-e-s—that's the only reason I can think of."

Then they went forward, rocking, plunging, tipping half-way over on one side to be thrown back again and half-way over the other the next moment; the wagon groaning and banging; the horses stumbling into washouts and climbing over rocks; past the grim shapes; under the lassoes—down and down—miles it seemed to Ross and Betsey, into a valley that had no outline or shape but looked ever like an abyss of deepest night.

At the bottom, they came upon a smoother and pleasanter bit of road, past open fields and some barns

and houses, which they saw in dim outline and from which came the barking of dogs. Two or three times they crept over rickety bridges, and once they had to ford a stream. Wherever possible, Edgert urged his horses to a trot, but the night was too dark and the track too uncertain for speed.

"Isn't that the throb of an engine?" asked Ross as they neared the upper end of the valley.

"Yes, we are coming to some rigs," replied Edgert, and in a few minutes they turned a jutting point of the hill and again saw the blaze of gas before them.

The road ran quite close to one of the derricks and a driller stood in the doorway.

"Mornin', Edgert," said the man. "Goin' over ter Hemlock?"

"Yes, Gross; that's where I'm bound for. What time is it?"

"Just past two. Been some shootin' over there, we heard."

"Yes, an accident. I've got the doctor."

"Accident, hell! 'Twas a plain case of a spotter tryin' ter kill a moonshiner."

Edgert started his horses forward before the sentence was finished and made no reply.

"You better wait here for daylight," shouted the man.

There was no answer, and the driller went back to his place beside the casing and twisted down the stem of the mighty drill.

Soon the road grew rough and uneven again and very slowly they mounted another great hill, doubling back at length and finally coming to a point fifteen hundred feet above the wells where they had spoken with the driller. They had travelled for miles back and forth upon the side of the mountain and were still so near the wells that they could hear the rattle of the bull-wheel and the coughing of the exhaust pipe.

"What wells are those?" asked Mrs. Wheeler when the horses, nearing the top of the long climb, stopped again to rest.

"The ones at Hunt's which we passed a while back," answered Edgert.

"It seems hours since we left them," said Mrs. Wheeler.

"You must be very tired," said Ross. "This is a terrible ride for you to take in the night."

"No more terrible than for you and for Mr. Edgert; and I am not tired, but very anxious." Then, turning to Edgert, she said in a low tone: "Mr. Edgert, who shot my brother?"

"Oh, I don't know, Betsey. Really I don't. The messenger told me only a few details, and I didn't more than half-listen to him. Gee up, boys; gee up; its coming daylight."

And then Ross noticed for the first time that the strange shapes, which had been slowly moving back of them as if to fall in with a procession of phantoms,

were taking dim but more tangible forms, still ghostly, distorted and forbidding. The light came slowly, creeping on as though discouraged with the task of always driving the darkness before it and finding that the places it had kissed into life and warmed and vivified the day before, so soon became dark and cold and sodden when it left them for a time. Ross watched its coming with more than usual interest, for he now began to realize fully the character of the country they had passed through in the darkness. The frowsy, bushy fields, the patches of half-cut woodland, the twisting, rocky roadway, the sheer descent, at times starting from the very edge of the wagon track, inviting a plunge and tumble hundreds of feet down the mountain side, the frowning masses of rock that threatened to slide upon them—the neglected, desolate, discouraging, hopeless appearance of a lumber country where the soil does not invite cultivation of the fields after lumbermen and fire have together carried on their destructive work—all these pressed upon him as the daylight slowly made its way.

Looking back, just as they turned one of the numerous curves in the road, Ross saw two men step out of the thick fringe of bushes through which they were moving and hurry forward after them. He touched Edgert on the arm and whispered in his ear that two men were following. Betsey, worn with the journey,

leaned half-asleep upon Edgert's shoulder and did not hear.

"Yes," said Edgert quietly, "they've been with us since we left the top of the hill. We've passed them twice."

"Who are they?"

"Spotters, I suppose. They skulk along behind us a ways and then where the road turns they cut across and wait for us to pass them again. What you going to do?" as Ross threw the blankets from his lap and started to leave the wagon.

"I'm going back to have it out with the scoundrels right now."

"You ain't going to do any such thing," replied Edgert so emphatically that Mrs. Wheeler sat up with a start. "If that boy is alive up at Hemlock, you are wanted there, and if he isn't, I'll come back with you on your hunt."

"What is it, Mr. Edgert?" asked Mrs. Wheeler.

"Oh, the doctor thought he saw a bear and he wanted to chase him—with nothing but a revolver to fight with," was the reply.

She looked at the doctor with a puzzled expression. "Oh, Dr. Ross, you surely could not be so careless. And besides, we are almost there, aren't we, Mr. Edgert?"

"Yes, in ten minutes we will be down the hill and find a better road, and then it is but a short distance. P-h-e-w!" And he brought the horses to their

haunches, so suddenly did he halt them. Out of the half-light of the dawn in front of them rode two men on horseback with rifles across their saddle bows.

"Helloa, Edgert," shouted a voice they all knew.

"Cameron, as I'm a sinner!" said Edgert with evident relief, as the riders came forward and greeted them warmly.

"Mr. Cameron, is my brother——" Betsey asked, not daring to finish the sentence.

"He is alive, and I think he can be saved. Anxiety to do what I could for him kept me at the house or I should have met you nearer the junction."

He looked inquiringly at Edgert, who in turn made a quick motion with his thumb over his shoulder, and a significant glance passed between them. The horsemen fell in behind the wagon, and, as soon as the mountain was safely passed, the party pushed ahead and came to Cameron's headquarters just as the sun was rising.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

COON DISCOVERS A SECRET.

It was a month before Coon Tubbs was able, with the help of his mother and sister, to creep out of bed and sit beside the window. The wound in his side proved a most dangerous one, and for several days his hold upon life was by no means secure. Dr. Ross seldom left the boy during these first days, and Betsey, with that intuitive faculty which is ever the subject of so much wonderment in women, became all at once a competent nurse and assistant, requiring but a word or two of explanation to make her understand exactly what should be done in almost any emergency. Mr. and Mrs. Tubbs came on, and when the greatest danger was past, Mr. Tubbs returned home to send forward furnishings and comforts which turned the old house that had been used by Cameron as an office, sleeping-room and general storage for supplies, into a cozy and acceptable home.

Dr. Ross had not been with them in a fortnight, though he took opportunity several times to send to Coon some delicacy which he knew would whet the boy's appetite and add to his strength.

When finally able to bear his weight upon his feet, Coon made more rapid progress, and by the end of June he could take walks of considerable length. What astonished all was his constant good nature and gentleness. Again he was the little boy of the farm, and loved them all, with never a selfish, petulant word or act. The shadow of death drove away the contaminating influences of the dance hall, the gambling den, the drinking bout, the illegal pursuit, the skulking from authorities. The patient devotion of his sister and mother through long nights and days, the anxiety of his father, the solicitude of Cameron, the watchfulness of Dr. Ross, awakened the young man's true nature, and to each he gave back in joyous laugh, cheerfulness of manner, and open gratitude full measure of repayment.

"Coon," said his sister one day as they sat on a favorite knoll on the hill back of one of the derricks and watched the pumper on his rounds, "I want you to tell me who fired the bullet that wounded you."

"Oh, pshaw, Bet, what do you want to bother your head about that for?"

"Well, I want to know if my guess has been correct."

"To tell you truly, Bet, I don't know who fired it."

"But you have suspicions?"

"Yes, though they may not be right. I've been a moonshiner a long time and have given the Torpedo

Company a whole lot of trouble. The spotters had been trying two years or more to catch me, but I dodged them. Probably one of them saw me and took a shot just for luck, thinking he'd wing me."

"You were talking with Mr. Cameron at the time, weren't you, Coon?"

"Now, who told you that?"

"Oh, I've heard a word dropped here and there, and something you once said in delirium led me to believe so."

"And don't you know that people never talk real things in delirium? You are a pretty nurse to be listening to what your patient says, and then bring it up against him!" and he reached over and patted her cheek.

"Coon, did Wheeler fire that shot?"

He looked at her a moment. "I don't know, Bet; I don't know."

"You think he did, don't you Coon?"

"I did think so; it may have been one of fifty others."

"But why should any of the others want to kill Mr. Cameron?"

"See here, little girl, you are asking too many questions of a sick man, and I can't answer them. There's some things that I don't know, for you must remember that I've been tied down to bed for a month or more and haven't heard the news."

Betsey, looking very grave and serious, for a few

minutes watched the regular strokes of the walking beam of the derrick, as though it might give her a solution of the problems which bothered her.

"Dad and Dr. Ross are coming up to-morrow, Coon."

He glanced at her so quickly, and with so much of inquiry in his face, that she blushed in confusion.

"Bet, dear Bet, I am so sorry for you!" and he took her hand and pressed it to his lips.

"Why, Coon, what do you mean? I don't understand," though she blushed the deeper and her eyes swam with tears.

"I've seen it, Bet, ever since I first came to myself and found you and the doctor watching by my bed. You have tried to hide it even from yourself, and so has he; but I couldn't help knowing it. And I've been so sorry for you both, because I couldn't see any way out."

"Hush, Coon, you must not talk like that, for you say things which I have not permitted myself to think. You must help me, Coon, in every way, and not speak like that again, for it makes it so much harder for me to bear."

"Yes, yes, dear sis; I'll help you if I can."

"Well, this is how you may do it. The doctor is coming up with dad to see if you are able to go home to Bradan. When we get back there I'm going to ask dad to send me away somewhere to school—"

"To school, Bet?"

"Yes, where I may take up some study, I don't care what—music, bookkeeping, teaching, law, engraving—any of the manythings in which women are beginning to take part. He will object, because he is making money and he will think it is not necessary. But he now places great dependence upon you, Coon. He says you have seen all sides of life and know what you are about, and so if you join in with me, he will give his consent."

"And do you think, Bet, that you can forget this—this that has come upon you, if you go away?"

"Coon, I have learned that there is nothing so good for a sore and heavy heart as work. When I was a prisoner there for months in Paris, starving for a word from home and praying for escape from the man I had so blindly married, I found relief in work—work from morning till late at night, week in and week out for two years. How I blessed Mrs. Cameron and her husband that in their home-school, back there in the valley, they gave me a little start toward an education, for when I plunged into the study of the books which were purchased for me, the weary hours no longer weighed me down, but days sped almost without notice."

"I'll help you, Bet, if you think it will make you any happier."

And she took his thin, white hand and kissed it.

The next afternoon Coon called to his sister to get her hat and go with him for a walk. "We may be

leaving here in a day or two," he said, "and there's a spot down the road a bit that I want to visit before I quit the oil country."

They strolled along nearly a mile from the settlement of wells and in the direction of the junction, until they were nearing one of the steepest hills in the vicinity. Its sides were covered with great masses of rocks, broken into streets and alleys of so regular a character that the place was known as Rock City, and was visited by many exploring parties every year. Trees of mammoth size grew upon the tops of the rock masses, sending their roots down the sides of the stones into the soil of the streets, forming fantastic loops, swings, ladders and festoons which in turn furnished lodging places for soft mosses, lichens, and ferns. Under the thick foliage of a timbered tract, which up to that time had defied the approach of the lumbermen, it was a dark and gloomy spot and few cared to penetrate further than a half-dozen of the streets, which turned so many angles and had such peculiar endings, either abrupt or tapering down to mere fissures, so that they comprised a labyrinth from which it was not always easy to extricate one's self.

Just where the road turned to avoid the hill and crept along through a dugway above the stream, Coon stopped and they rested a few minutes under a maple.

"You have walked too fast," said his sister. "I should have cautioned you before."

"No, I am not tired, but I wanted to rest with you here a little before I go up amongst the rocks."

"You must not attempt that, Coon, dear. There is nothing you care to see in the rocks."

"Yes, there is, sis. I've got a cache up there in a cave."

"A cache? I don't understand you, Coon."

"Oh, I forgot; you are not a moonshiner. Well, I'll tell you. We moonshiners had to pack our glycerine on our backs, and we had a habit of hiding it in certain places near wells that we expected to shoot, or in any good territory. Sometimes we would make a good many trips and get a whole lot of the nitro stored up, and then some blamed spotter would catch on and capture the supply. Another chap and I found a cave up here in the city a-ways, and when we had some money we put in a big supply, for it is in a mighty safe place. Just a few days before I was shot, my chum was pinched when shooting a well over near Custer City, and of course they railroaded him to the penitentiary for two years and a half.

"Now, you see, Bet, I'm going out of the moonshine business, but I don't want to leave the nitro up there in the rocks. In time, some excursion party might run onto it, get to fooling with the cans, and then there'd be trouble for innocent people. I've written to a couple of the boys in the profession telling them where they can find it and promising to mark the spot for them. See these little strips of cloth—red, white,

blue and black, and then the same thing over again? Well, I've promised to tie these along the way in accordance with a plan which they will understand, and then my work will be finished as a moonshiner."

"You are not strong enough to do this, Coon. Why not explain it to Mr. Cameron and dad, and let them attend to it?"

"They couldn't find the place in a thousand years, Bet; and, besides that, it would be mixing them up in the moonshine business, and if they were caught at it—well, it would be another victory for old Lanphere and a certain other individual both of us know. I can do it all right and keep them out of it, for it isn't a job that they would care to attempt. You stay here beside the road in the clearing and watch for dad and Dr. Ross. They ought to come along pretty soon, and maybe we can get a ride back home with them."

He fondled her hair a moment, and drew her head to his shoulder and kissed her. "Bet, he said, "I used never to think that you would be such a pretty woman as you are."

"Fie, Coon; I am afraid you are a flatterer."

"No flattery, Bet, dear; just the plain truth." And he kissed her again and then started up the hill whistling. She heard him for a considerable time, and once she caught a glimpse of him through the trees and waved her handkerchief. She saw him reply

with a sweep of his cap and a motion like the throwing of a kiss from his hand.

After a little, Betsey fell to watching the dugway, as it was nearing the time when her father and Dr. Ross might be expected. She wondered which would observe her first, for she made up her mind to keep very still as they approached and see if they would discover her. She asked herself what she would say to the doctor, and how he would greet her; and then she checked herself, endeavored to put him out of her thoughts, and turned them again to her brother.

Poor lad, what a hard life he had led—a wanderer, a castaway, a fugitive, sometimes sleeping in barns or in the woods; often creeping along over rough trails, pushing through brush, wading streams, climbing up and down hills with a knapsack on his back containing enough of the explosive to send a hundred men into eternity in an instant, and every second in danger of being himself the victim of a misstep, a fall, or a sudden jar. During his convalescence, Coon had told her a great deal about this life he had led, and, as she thought now of how heavy the hand of fate had rested upon him, the tears sprang from her eyes and coursed down her cheeks.

But it was all to be changed now. They were going home together, where Coon would be happy; where he would have a pleasant room, comfortable clothing, regular meals, and would go into business with his father. Coon loved horses; when they were living

on the farm, he had a way of getting along with the animals, and he never had to whip them, either. He had been so cheerful since his father had asked him to go home. He talked about it so much with them all, that she was sure he would live a contended, industrious, honorable life from this time on.

And Coon meant what he said, too. He was such a determined young fellow. He had never been mean and really bad—only wild, heedless, selfish, as she herself had been. Really, there was more for her father and mother to forgive in her than there was in Coon. She was two years older than her brother. She ought to have influenced him to better things by her own example. He was such an open-natured boy, and so easily led that——

Betsey heard in the distance the faint rattle of wagon wheels and the tread of horses.

CHAPTER XXXIV.**MOONSHINER AND SPOTTER.**

It was with considerable difficulty that Coon Tubbs made his way up the steep, rough path to the city of rocks. He was still weak from his long confinement, and the walk from the wells to the place where his sister awaited him was the longest he had taken since he had left his bed. But Coon had a purpose, and he would permit no thought of fatigue to drive it from his mind. He had written his friends that he would mark the way to his store of glycerine so they could find it, and he was determined to do it. As long as he remained in Betsey's view, he went forward with firm step and jaunty carriage, though the effort cost his utmost self-control, but when she was no longer in view he proceeded with less speed.

Coon entered the curious city of enormous sandstone blocks by the main avenue. He was revived somewhat by the cooler air, damp from the melting ice which remained in the pathways and sheltered corners. Though June was well advanced, these narrow, shaded streets admitted little of the sun, and

midsummer often saw them sheltering the remembrances of winter.

Coon paused to take a drink from the spring at the picnic place, and then went forward through a long tunnel formed by two of the huge blocks which were separated at the base but still clung together at the top. He came into an intricate network of streets that were seldom traversed by any save those who made a study of the place. Here he looked for some marks on a small birch tree, and when they were found, Coon chose the street he would follow, and tied to a root one of the colored strips of cloth he carried in his hand. These he fixed to branches or twigs at every turn, and to one standing upon a corner in the route he followed, two of the signals were in view. After a number of angles were passed, the street came to an abrupt stop, and through aid of the festooned roots wandering over the perpendicular wall, the boy climbed slowly up the face of the block. Fixing a signal at the edge, he went forward and paused at an opening in the trees to look off over the valley before him. The roadway wound along the hillside like a string of tow, and there in the shade of the maple was his sister. He waved his hat to her and called a clear, ringing "Halloa!" Soon he saw the fluttering of her handkerchief and knew that she was greeting him with love.

"Poor little Bet," he said, as the tears came to his eyes. "I hope I may be able to help you in some

way, Bet; but I don't know how. The way may come to me when I least expect it, and then I'll remember my promise, Bet." And he kissed his hands many times and wafted the kisses toward her.

Turning, Coon took his course over the housetops of the silent city. He leaped narrow alleys, but when the streets were too wide for this he knew where to find the trunks of fallen trees upon which he might safely pass over those depths which knew only the chattering of squirrels and chipmunks, the song of the birds, the pattering rain, the fall of a giant of the forest, the roar of a winter storm, or the ghostly rustle of dead leaves. But Coon did not stop to think of this—only to fix markers of cloth that the path might not be mistaken.

Once while tying one of the markers he heard a sound, as of the contact of a boot with rock. He paused and listened a long time in some alarm, but, hearing nothing further, he continued on his way.

Coon came at last to one side of an oblong court, possibly five yards wide and twice that distance in length. From where he stood there appeared to be only perpendicular walls inclosing the court, the floor of which was twenty feet below; but when Coon tied his last marker to a small twig near the ground and then swung himself down the root ladder to the bottom, he stepped back under a shelving part of the rock which was not easily detected from the top, and disappeared from view. Here was a gallery,

formed by the cutting away of the lower part of the rock to a depth of about eight feet. It was not unlike those old-fashioned buildings where the second story projects some distance into the street, leaving a covered porch or walk the whole length of the house. Against the rock at the back of the gallery was a covering of hemlock boughs, now broken and dead. Coon threw off his coat and then carefully lifted and cleaned away the branches, exposing several rows of nitro-glycerine cans, as dry and bright as when they had been stored in their present location months before.

"Two, four, six, eight," he counted up one of the rows to the end, and then noted the number of rows. "Four hundred and eighty-six quarts. That's right, as I remember it. And there's the rope and swing to take them up as we let them down. Everything is all right, and it is as pretty a cache as any moon-shiner ever made. It took a lot of work and cost some money; but I don't care. Preston and Ensworth may have it and welcome, for they are a couple of good fellows and have both helped me out of trouble before now. It was Ensworth who knocked that Pithole gambler's arm up just in time to save me from getting a bullet when I showed up his cheating; and——"

Coon's voice stopped, as did the hand which was dusting the dead hemlock needles from the tops of the cans nearest him. He stood motionless. His

quick ears, trained to be ever alert, caught sounds that told him as plainly as though he could see, that some one was picking his way cautiously down the face of the rock by the root staircase.

"God!" he whispered. "I thought I heard some one following me. I'll bet it's a spotter, and I'm cornered without a gun." He glanced at the glycerine cans and smiled. Then drew himself to full height and stood resolute. "Now, Coon Tubbs, don't weaken!" he said.

Peering out under the edge of the rock roof, Coon saw the feet of a man—one of them resting upon a root, and the other feeling carefully down the rock in search of the next place that would bear the weight of the body above. The loop was found, and then the other foot moved, passed its fellow, and in turn reached a place of lodgement. The body came into view, and the climber, looking down and seeing the distance was not now great, leaped lightly to the leaf mould, which scarcely gave sound to the jump.

The man glanced about him, and seeing the chamber and Coon standing within it, stepped forward a pace or two, and then halted. For a full minute they looked each other straight in the eyes.

"I've caught you at last, Tubbs, and with the goods on the person."

"Cornered me, you mean, Wheeler—not caught."

Wheeler ran his eyes swiftly about the court.

"Caught, safe enough. You don't get out of here alive unless you are roped to me."

"Then neither of us gets out of here alive," said Coon with perfect calmness.

"Oh, come, now, that's too good," Wheeler laughed. "You can't bluff me with a threat like that. You ain't fool enough to throw away your life for two or three years in the penitentiary, where you will have plenty of company among others like you."

Watching Wheeler narrowly, Coon stooped and lifted in his hand a rough, jagged piece of the rock which he had worked up to the surface of the leaf-mould with his feet.

"You come in and take me out, if you think I am bluffing," was his reply.

Wheeler carried a short magazine rifle, and he commenced to swing it carelessly back and forth with the probable intention of bringing it to his shoulder and covering his man. He did not hurry in his movements, for he realized that the situation was critical.

"Don't you try that," said Coon, shifting the stone to the hand of his uninjured arm, raising it above his shoulder and poising it upon his palm over the glistening cans at his feet. "Drop that gun on the ground, or this charge here will go off quicker than you can pull a trigger!"

What was it that Eli Wheeler saw in the eyes and face of this young man that made him obey, and as he did so turn faint and almost powerless? What

great fear fell upon him, and beat down his courage and sent despair knocking at his heart as it had never knocked there before? When had he seen that look? Had it not blazed from the eyes of Duncan Cameron in the back room of La Vintage, when, overcome with passion and moved by taunts he had leaped upon Wheeler in the effort to catch the swindler's throat and by force compel a return of some portion of that of which he had been robbed? Or, was there not something of it in his wife's eyes, back there in Paris, when he sneeringly bade her make her living in the streets as a common woman?

"You are as suspicious as ever, Coon," he faltered, for the moment unnerved. "See, I will disarm myself as you request, and we'll talk it over on an equal footing. Put down that stone; it looks mighty dangerous so nearly over those glycerine cans. We can come to terms."

"You can't make any terms with me, Wheeler. I wouldn't believe any promise you might make, for you wouldn't keep one made on a deathbed. I've been a moonshiner too long to believe a damned spotter. You might come it over poor old dad, or wheedle Cameron and hundreds of others, but not Coon Tubbs."

"But I am not trying to wheedle you, Coon. I am willing to let you escape if you will give me your word that you will stop moonshining and clear out of the country."

"You already know that I've stopped moonshining. Ever since Cameron came here as a superintendent, you've had a spy among his men, and he's told you everything that's been going on. You know that I was intending to leave the State to-morrow, and you know that I wouldn't be well enough from the effects of your bullet to do moonshining in a year, should I want to. I thought you might go away when you heard that, and so I came up here to-day——"

"To mark the way of your cache for others?"

"Well, yes, partly that and partly to see if you would follow me. It appears that you are not satisfied with what you have done, but want to bring more disgrace on poor old dad and marm by sending their son to prison; and so you followed to arrest me."

"You are wrong, Coon. We could have placed you under arrest at any time since you have been confined to the house with your wound, if I had wanted it that way. But I have had compassion on you. I have thought that I may have wronged your father—and others. I was led on to it and did not see the harm then as I since have, and so I made some amends by not sending the deputies in and taking you out to prison, wound or no wound. I will own that I have been watching you, but only to secure this opportunity. I followed you to-day so that I might meet you alone and talk it over with you; possibly to show you the error of your course."

"You lie, Wheeler, as black as you have ever lied! You wanted to catch me 'with the goods on the person,' or you never could have convicted me, even in Lanphere's courts."

Moving from one foot to the other as they talked, inch-by-inch, Wheeler worked himself forward until he was almost within arm's length of Coon. Now his shifty eyes were still, but they blazed with an unnatural light that caught the gaze of the weakened, trembling boy and held him immovable and powerless. From Coon's vision the outlines of Wheeler's face faded, and only the two blazing points remained—fascinating, irresistible in their compelling force; now moving slowly from side to side, but ever coming nearer and nearer.

Time was banished from the universe. Seconds lengthened into years.

There was something long ago that Coon wanted to do—what was it? Ages before, he had been talking with somebody and the echo of the words was still ringing in his ears—but who was it, and where was he now? Someone was in great peril—from what source?

Why could he not remember, or take hold upon something tangible?

Ah—yes, yes, there was once a man standing there—a man whom Coon had been dodging for months and who had made an attempt to kill him—a man

to be hated, shunned, feared; but the man had disappeared, and there was now nothing in all the world but these numbing lights, which almost froze the blood in his veins.

Something touches Coon's upraised arm—poised above his head, he knows not for what purpose. He feels the icy clasp of an object and rejoices that the sleeve of his shirt does not let it come in contact with his flesh. Slowly the cold thing, from which he would shrink if he could, moves toward his wrist.

But now Coon remembers! Ages ago there was something in his hand that would keep this man, whom he feared, from making him a prisoner; something that would fly to his sister Betsey and set her free to roam hand-in-hand with her lover; something that would leap, and shout and shake the earth, and roar; but something that Coon did not fear.

The blazing points can no longer drive that from Coon's memory, or burn out the knowledge that this cold thing that is creeping up his wrist is trying to seize that which will prevent the shame of his arrest and imprisonment, or give to little Bet her freedom.

Why not let it go? He will—he will—but the lights sparkle with brilliant colors in his eyes and a voice shouts in his ear to hold! to stop! for God's sake to stop!

No, he will not stop—he will not hold! There—unloose the fingers, for the cold thing is now creep-

ing over the back of his hand. A tremendous effort—it is gone! Betsey's freedom!

An eternity passes.

Coon's feeble shout is swallowed in a roar that fills his ears, and a blinding flash blots out for all time those cursed points of light.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE STORY IN THE ROCKS.

BETSEY leaned forward, watching the driveway with expectancy and vainly endeavoring to still the fluttering at her heart, which came, she knew not why. The horses appeared to her sight over a little rise in the winding road.

In that instant the earth rocked as though shaken to the center by a fearful convulsion, and a roar like the burst of mighty thunders filled the air. The woman was thrown headlong upon the sward, and the trembling ground tossed her to and fro as by the pitching of a boat. A great hurricane of wind rushed down the mountain side, bending before it the giant trees and hurling dead branches from lofty heights. The centuries rolled backward in the city of rocks, and the throes which accompanied its birth shook again the massive blocks to their foundations, snapping open new fissures and streets where solid granite blocked the way, or thrusting against each other the surfaces which had once been a concrete mass but which had long been separated.

The wagon bringing Mr. Tubbs and Dr. Ross to headquarters was on the brow of the up-grade when the first shock came upon them. For one brief instant the road seemed to fall away, and then to rebound like the recoil of a bow, lifting them in the air and throwing the horses upon their sides. Edgert, half-leaping, half-thrown from his seat, but without losing presence of mind, staggered to the heads of the animals and had just secured one of them when Dr. Ross ran forward and gave him the necessary aid. A shower of stones and fragments of limbs fell upon them, but they held the frightened beasts upon the ground until the immediate effects of the explosion disappeared and the air was again calm.

"What was it?" asked Ross as Mr. Tubbs came forward and commenced unhitching the harness so the horses might rise in safety.

"Glycerine explosion," answered Edgert, "and the worst one I ever heard or felt. I am afraid that more than one poor devil has paid the penalty for some one's carelessness."

"But I don't understand it," said the doctor as he permitted the horse he had been holding down to rise, and then stroked it reassuringly. "I don't see any place where there has been an explosion, and still it appeared to be directly underneath us."

"No," said Mr. Tubbs, "if that charge of glycerine had been under us, we wouldn't be talkin' it over now. It was up here in the rocks. See that little

cloud of white smoke? Well, that ain't far from the place."

"There's no rigs up there," remarked Edgert, "and that was fifty times as much nitro as ever was put into a well. I'll bet a dollar it was a moonshiner's storehouse."

"Father!"

They heard a cry, and turning, saw a woman running toward them.

"Betsey—my God, what has happened!" and Mr. Tubbs darted up the road with a speed far beyond one of his years, and caught his daughter in his arms.

"Speak, little gal, what—why, how is it that you was down here? Oh, to meet your dad—and you run right into a big explosion! There, there!" and he patted her tumbled head, pillowed now upon his shoulder.

"Oh, dad, it's Coon—it's poor, poor Coon!" she sobbed.

An icy hand gripped her father's heart, and his face took on the deep-set lines of a new sorrow; a horror, brought suddenly to his door.

"Coon! Why, Betsey, how did poor wounded Coon come to be up there in the rocks?"

"He had glycerine stored there, and he came to mark the place that some of his former companions to whom he had written might find it. Oh, dad, dear old dad! he hadn't been gone from me but a little

time when the explosion came. Let us go to him, all of us, he may only be injured and we can help him."

She started as though she would go forward up the mountain, but her father held her close to his side and slowly shook his head.

"There's no hope up there, little gal. No man could have been near that charge and live a second. Our boy is dead, and there won't be left even a shred of his poor body."

Father and daughter sank upon the bank beside the road, and with mingled tears sought in caresses to comfort each other, speaking few words—mute from their grief.

Cameron and several of the men came running from the wells where the effect of the explosion had been so great that the sections of two derricks had been thrown down, and windows broken in all of the houses. They persuaded Mr. Tubbs and Betsey to enter the wagon and go forward with one of the men as driver, for Coon's mother was yet to be told the sad fate of her son.

A searching party was formed and finally penetrated to the scene of the explosion. It was a difficult task, for in many places great blocks of rock were dislodged or toppled over, and sometimes the bits of cloth left by Coon to guide his fellows, and which Betsey explained to them, were concealed under the debris. As they drew near the place, the havoc wrought by the tremendous force pent up in nearly

five hundred quarts of nitro-glycerine was apparent on every side. The trunks of trees were split in twain, broken into splinters or stripped of branches and verdure; squirrels, struck dead as they scampered merrily over the ground, lay there before them; half-raised upon his haunches, petrified by the fearful concussion, they saw a hedge hog; birds, stopped in flight or song and falling with helpless, outstretched wings, were mute witnesses of the awful stroke of death.

They came upon the place at last, and saw in the court which Coon had used as a hiding-place for the explosive, a tumble of broken rock which they could not hope to remove without the labor of several days, and the day came to a close before progress in the search could be made.

In time they found Coon's coat and portions of the battered tins in which the nitro-glycerine had been stored. The broken stock and twisted barrel of a repeating rifle caused much speculation, as they knew the boy had not carried one. Beyond this, they came upon some semblance of a body.

Pieces of the clothing told them it was not the body of Coon Tubbs. One of these fragments of cloth protected from destruction a bundle of papers, nearly all of which were written by Eli Wheeler's hand, or by the hand of Lanphere. They were statements and memoranda of transactions in which Duncan Cameron and many others were deeply concerned. When

these and further evidences were discovered, those who searched knew that they looked upon the body of the Spotter.

And this was all that appeared when the broken rocks were pushed aside and the place of the tragedy was brought to view. Yet from these meagre witnesses, those who knew the two lives which were so suddenly snuffed out upon that spot, could read the mystery there concealed from others.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LANPHERE WRITES A NOTE.

A MESSENGER rode over from the junction and handed to Cameron a letter, which proved to be an invitation from President Lanphere, asking Cameron to come to his office on the following afternoon. The note suggested that Harry Edgert might accompany Cameron on his visit, and closed with the significant statement that Mr. Lanphere had recently come into the possession of facts which led him to believe that the litigation between them might be discontinued by stipulation.

"What has induced such a suggestion on the part of Lanphere?" asked Cameron of Harry, when they met in Oleford the next day and were discussing the note which had been sent by the president of the Cygnet.

"I surmise that he has gained some knowledge of the contents of the papers that were found on Wheeler's body, and has come to the conclusion that a settlement will be the wisest plan to pursue."

"How should he know of their contents? The

papers were given to Mrs. Wheeler and are still in her possession."

"You forget, Mr. Cameron, that the coroner made an examination of the documents and took a full list of them. I was present and insisted that every scrap of the writings found in Wheeler's pockets should be left in the possession of the widow. Nothing could be done, however, to prevent the coroner from making such use of the knowledge he gained on the examination as would be profitable to him, and I suppose he turned that knowledge to account as quickly as he could get the news to Lanphere."

"You think he sold the information?"

"Well, that is a question. The influence of the Cygnet is far-reaching and each official in many counties owes his position to this company, which has come into control of so many things. The coroner, no doubt, is an ambitious man, and at any rate he knows that he might as well move out of the State as to conceal from Lanphere the knowledge that Wheeler left statements of his own, and a number of personal letters from Lanphere, which completely prove our contention that a conspiracy existed between these two men to swindle you and many others. I looked for some such move as this, but did not expect that Lanphere would appear in it himself—I supposed he would leave that to his lawyers."

"He may think it of so delicate a nature that he prefers to deal with it in person."

“Yes, that is the explanation, without doubt. I think it true that all of the important movements to bring under the control of the Cygnet the political machinery of at least two States and the operation of several great railroads, to say nothing of the entire petroleum industry, have been personally directed and nearly always carried out by Lanphere. Several of the men in whom he first placed confidence and upon whom he depended, either through timidity or lack of power to grasp the moves planned for them, failed in their work, and Lanphere lost faith in every man whom he could not hold to his service by fear.”

“Did he have such a whip with which to threaten Wheeler?”

“Possibly; though I have not discovered what it was. The fact that Wheeler prepared those statements, and kept with them letters to prove their genuineness, is evidence that he felt his safety lay in being ready to meet Lanphere with sure weapons should the necessity arise. But, Mr. Cameron, have you considered what course you will follow when Lanphere proposes the compromise which he here indicates?”

“Yes, Harry, I have given it constant thought since receiving his note yesterday, and have reached a decision. In this I am guided in great measure by the wishes of Mrs. Cameron and Mr. Tubbs. I spent last night in Bradan, and we talked it over

together. I will enter into a stipulation to discontinue the suits."

Edgert shook his head in the disappointment which he could not conceal.

"I know, Harry, that it is not what you would advise, and I have thought of your share in it as well as of my own. You will say that we now have everything in our hands, and can prove our contention so clearly that even courts which are controlled cannot refuse us justice; and you will also tell me to consider the moral effect of the victory. You are too unselfish, Harry, to ask that your part in such a victory shall have any weight in the negotiations, and are looking only toward what I have been fighting to accomplish these several years. I will not deny that it is hard to give over a struggle for principle, but I am going to shut my eyes to it and surrender when I may do so with honor. The controlling influence in such a course, as has been pointed out to me by my wife, is Mrs. Wheeler."

"Mrs. Wheeler?"

"Yes. If the litigation is to be continued, she will of necessity be dragged into it—the nature of the papers which came into her possession on the death of her husband, makes this certain, and the story of her life will be brought out in the courts and paraded in the public prints in the most unpleasant form which the lawyers for the Cygnet can invent. Not that there is anything to her discredit—only the mis-

takes of an ignorant girl; but she has developed into a woman of fine sensibilities and high character. Rather than see her wounded by a new threshing of the whole affair, I am ready to forego any satisfaction I might find in a successful prosecution."

"But surely, Mr. Cameron, you do not intend to permit this man to keep thousands which he entered into a conspiracy with Wheeler to take from you under the shadow of a business transaction. Mrs. Wheeler would never consent to any such course as that. She will look upon it as her duty to see that the wrong against you be righted, if any sacrifice she can make will help to do it. You may not expect her to be satisfied by an arrangement that provides for anything less."

"In this you echo the belief of her father, who in his quaint way declared that 'Betsey's bin hurt by what befel her, but the pain of her hurt ain't so great that she forgits that you have suffered. I know her, Cameron; she'll stand it all over again, and more, rather than see you lose your rights.'"

Harry paced the floor a moment in thought, then coming to Cameron's side, said: "If Lanphere is anxious to compromise, he will doubtless make a proposition. It is for you to decide what terms you will accept."

"I want nothing from him, Harry, except the pay for Cameron farm at its value when the deal with Wheeler was made, a return of the money furnished

by me at that time and pay at the customary royalty for oil since produced on the farm."

"You may have double that figure, Mr. Cameron."

"I will not accept it. More than is rightfully mine would do me no good."

Edgert looked at him in admiration. "I understand you, Mr. Cameron, but an honest man who runs up against Henry Lanphere will get left. You had best let me talk business with him."

"Why you are honest, Harry!" laughed Cameron.

"I hope so, in some things. But my ideas of honesty would not arouse in me any scruples about making Lanphere pay for his rascality. As your attorney, Mr. Cameron, I shall insist upon one-sixth, instead of one-eighth royalty on the oil produced, and shall demand an inspection of the pipe line records to determine the quantity. He must pay you all fees, costs and disbursements up to date, including lawyer's charges, and interest on the principal from the date Wheeler and Judge Purser carried out the scheme at your house. I shall insist also upon the payment to you of a liberal salary for the two years and more you spent in tracking Wheeler and in returning home again——"

"Harry, you must not mention that. It is a part of my life that I am trying to forget, and which I hope to entirely lose when this miserable business is over and we have gone away from the scenes which

are continually recalling it. Simply what is my due from Lanphere as I have indicated, and nothing else."

The young man glanced at his watch. "We must be going, Mr. Cameron. I think Lanphere mentioned three o'clock as the hour he would be at liberty."

"Yes, and we have fifteen minutes in which to walk to his office. I do not think it is to be a case of bearding the lion, Harry."

"No," and Harry smiled, "more like the spider and the fly."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHY OIL PRICES CHANGED.

PRESIDENT LANPHERE was delighted to meet Duncan Cameron, of whom he had heard, but with whom he had not previously had a personal acquaintance—and Mr. Harry Edgert, too, whose brilliant course at the bar was already becoming the subject of comment on the part of older lawyers—really, President Lanphere did not recall that it had been his good fortune to meet Mr. Edgert before; or, was there an occasion?—yes, there was, he believed, a brief meeting one peculiarly trying day upon which many things occurred to test his patience and tire him out—an occasion when Mr. Edgert had found his own patience exhausted, too, by the interference of some clerks who did not understand the nature of his business and he had been compelled almost to force himself into Mr. Lanphere's presence for the purpose of serving some papers—and would the gentlemen pray be seated?

Harry grinned as he recalled with pleasure the occasion to which the suave, bowing, obsequious man before him referred. He remembered how very dif-

ferent was Lanphere's greeting when he had thrust into the President's hands the papers referred to; and how the great oil magnate stormed, called him a conscienceless blackmailer, and ordered him from the room. But the young lawyer said nothing to disturb the present tranquillity.

Ahem! President Lanphere had begged an interview with Mr. Cameron for the purpose of righting what he had within a few days learned was a wrong; unwittingly, unknowingly committed through the rascality of a man who appeared to be so honest and straightforward in his manner and dealing that not the slightest suspicion arose against him—a man, let us say in passing—who had never been employed by the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company, but who came forward with a plain business proposition that could not be overlooked by the company in whose hands, by force of circumstances, had been placed the tremendous responsibility of fostering and building up the great industry that so suddenly sprung upon a people unprepared to deal with it. From the very nature of things it was often necessary to accept the pledge, the word, the apparent good faith of people with whom transactions were carried on, and it was not possible always to investigate all sides of every move that was made. It thus happened that in a few instances—remarkably few indeed, considering the widely disseminated business and the great interests involved—the Company had

been led into transactions which were not countenanced by its president or directorate, and which were always amended when discovered. President Lanphere hoped—and the gentlemen who were associated with him in carrying out the broad and uplifting policies of this great organization which had providentially been formed for the good of humanity hoped—that Mr. Cameron would understand, and that Mr. Edgert would understand, that many details and minor transactions must of necessity be relegated to departments, and that it was a physical impossibility to be certain that every man employed was in all cases carrying out the benign intention of the Company.

Ahem! Not until recently—President Lanphere begged to say very recently—had the fact been drawn to his attention by a mutual friend, and one who had no interest at stake whatever, that the suit brought by Mr. Cameron was one in which the plaintiff really had a cause, and was not like the great majority of such actions which are commenced by designing and jealous persons for no less a purpose than blackmail. Upon receiving this hint, President Lanphere had sent immediately to the law department for all the papers in the case, and after carefully examining the records of the original transaction, and with the firm resolve to maintain the position he had taken in all business affairs since his

first venture, he followed up his investigation by an offer of settlement.

President Lanphere, however, must beg the gentlemen to remember that this was not through any fear or thought, still less of remote possibility, that the slightest proof could be brought that such a preposterous thing as a conspiracy to defraud Mr. Duncan Cameron, or anyone else under Heaven, ever existed between himself and this Eli Wheeler. Such a claim was false, wicked, monstrous! and that it had been set up in the complaint and already had to some extent, he was informed, been paraded in the courts, almost deterred him from taking steps to bring about an amicable understanding. But, remembering that public men and those who attempt to benefit their fellows are often misjudged and maligned, he had stifled his indignation, believing that the generosity and fairness of those who made the charge—misled no doubt by appearances and by the false rumors which many were so ready to set afloat—would lead them to make such public amends as good taste and common justice would suggest.

With this full explanation and statement before him, he asked, was Mr. Cameron ready to say upon what terms he would enter into a stipulation for the discontinuance of the proceedings?

Mr. Cameron was ready and was just upon the point of telling President Lanphere that the terms would be those which commended themselves to the

Cygnets Company through its honorable president, when he was interrupted by Edgert.

"The charge of conspiracy, Mr. Lanphere, can be proven beyond shadow of doubt. You know this to be so, else this meeting would never have been sought," he said quietly.

For the fraction of a second President Lanphere was disconcerted. He had looked for an easy victory over this young man who had been listening so sympathetically to his favorite theme—the Providential Mission and Eminent Justice of the Cygnets.

"Bravo!" And he laughed. "I always like to see a lawyer stick to his points. Do you know, my dear Edgert, that this Company has need of just such men as you. Naturally we have a vast amount of legal business and we find it most difficult to secure the services of men who may be trusted, even though we pay excellent salaries."

"I am doing fairly well in general practice," replied Harry with a bow. "But that is getting away from the question. Mr. Cameron is tired of litigation, and has authorized me to say that he will withdraw the suits brought against you and your Company upon these terms: Full payment for his farm at its value at the time the co-partnership was formed with Wheeler; return of the money put into the Cameron Farm Company by him; interest upon both sums to the present day; one-sixth royalty upon the oil produced upon the Cameron farm; full repay-

ment of all costs, disbursements and attorney's fees in the proceedings. I have urged him to demand salary for the time he has lost and also exemplary damages, but upon this he does not insist."

Lanphere was white with rage and for a moment he could not control his trembling lips to the formation of words.

"It is blackmail!" he whispered, "as I expected from the start. Blackmail, you young shyster, and no doubt you have a bargain to take half or two-thirds you secure for your part of the game. I won't pay it. The value of the farm was fictitious and the money never came into the Cygnet Company. I won't pay it, I say!"

"Very well; then there is no reason for our further delay," said Harry, picking up his gloves and rising.

"You can't milk money from me to pay for Wheeler's dishonesty," Lanphere continued.

"If Wheeler had been the only dishonest man in the transaction we would not try," replied Harry very calmly.

"I scarcely knew the man. There was no collusion or agreement between us whatever. He came to me possessing power of attorney to act for Cameron and the Cameron Farm Company, and I took the property at a much lower price than you declare in your complaint was placed upon it. The Cygnet Company has developed the territory and the product is in no degree Cameron's. Any money that Wheeler

may have swindled Cameron out of is no concern of ours. The Cygnet Company has had no part in it whatever—I have had no part in it whatever.”

“Then why did you invite us here?”

“Because—as I have tried to explain to you, I am convinced that Cameron did not receive any pay for his farm and I do not like to look upon wrong of that sort. I—that is, the Cygnet Company—would rather pay for the farm twice than hold property in which there is any shadow of doubt concerning the equity of the purchase.”

“Bosh, Mr. Lanphere! You are not dealing with a poor devil of a producer who is driven to the wall to get money or accommodation to carry on his exploitation. Nor with a man with a territory who never saw five hundred dollars at one time in his life. Your story is pretty and well told, your alleged object altruistic, but I have known your real object and true character ever since that day when Eli Wheeler went to the Cameron farm to accomplish your purpose and you waited at the Junction to learn the result of his visit. I stood beside you on the train when you and Wheeler met in the aisle, and I heard your question—‘Is he hooked?’ and Wheeler’s reply, ‘Fast as hell.’ I didn’t then know what it meant, but I did very soon afterwards, when the bubble burst and this man went out from his home a penniless wanderer. Let me assure you, Mr. Lanphere, that the most pleasing words I have ever heard

in my life are those in which you refuse to pay Mr. Cameron his very modest demand."

"What evidence of conspiracy is a chance word that may, or may not, have been spoken by me to a man I met on a train? And as for a visit to the Junction—why, I am constantly going everywhere to investigate property and watch operations. That such a visit was coincident with some other transaction is not significant."

"We are not losing sleep over the insufficiency or character of our evidence," was Harry's reply.

"Mr. Cameron," said Lanphere, turning to Duncan, "I appeal to you, as a man of honesty and integrity, to state whether you consider this eminently fair. I will admit that through the course followed by Wheeler—a course which I am now convinced was cunningly planned by him, that suspicion might be thrown upon me, and with the intent of reaping for himself some wicked advantage in the future—there is a slight reason for your entertaining the belief that you do. But, after thinking it all over, can you say there is a possibility of proving your suspicion to the satisfaction of a jury?"

"Your letters to Wheeler, Mr. Lanphere, leave no doubt whatever in my mind as to that," Cameron answered, looking him straight in the eyes.

The president of the Cygnet Oil Producing and Refining Company took a turn or two across his of-

fice floor and then stopping suddenly in front of Harry said:

"I shall insist, Mr. Edgert, in retaining you for a little service though you have refused the proffer of business at the hands of the Cygnet. You are familiar with the figures and details of this matter and there is no reason why it should not be closed at the present time. You may act for both parties and prepare copies of a stipulation of settlement along the lines you have proposed. You see, I am determined to bring you into our employment."

"In this case, Mr. Lanphere, I will act with pleasure. Shall it be at once?"

"Yes; too much time has been lost upon it already. I shall expect, gentlemen, that all—all documentary records bearing in any way upon the subject will be surrendered when the stipulation and satisfaction are passed."

"Certainly," said Cameron, "but as the papers are at Bradan it will be necessary for one of us to go there this evening and return in the morning."

"That will be entirely satisfactory," said Lanphere with cordiality, and he at once plunged into a discussion of other topics with Cameron, while Harry rapidly prepared the necessary documents. Lanphere was never the man to show that he had been hit, and within five minutes he more than hinted to Cameron that if he wanted to invest the money that would come

to him, no safer place could be found than to secure stock in the Cygnet.

"I thank you, Mr. Lanphere," was Cameron's reply, "but I am not looking for investment. This money will provide me a new Cameron farm far enough from the oil belt so that I shall be sure it will never be the subject of speculation. There will be something left besides, and with my work, if God prospers it, none of mine will ever come to want, and I may even be able to give assistance in deserving cases. I have no desire for great wealth. More than a man requires for his reasonable maintenance is a curse. Such surplus when drawn from the people at large, at the cost of want and misery to many homes, and perhaps ruin to the fond hopes and expectations of those who may have staked their all in some promising enterprise, appears to me to be the proceeds of an illegitimate and unholy advantage, which has been secured through unfair means. I trust you will not misunderstand me when I say that there are many higher aims for man than the mere pursuit of wealth."

Lanphere was about to launch out upon his favorite theme concerning the Providential medium embodied in the Cygnet and its Great Mission upon earth, when Harry arose and handed him the papers he had prepared. The shrewd president required but a moment's examination of the documents to see that

there was no fault in the work, and he expressed himself as entirely satisfied.

And thus on the following morning the business was speedily concluded. Cameron made the trip to Bradan and Mrs. Wheeler gladly gave into his hands every scrap of paper that connected the shameful past of her husband with either Lanphere or Cameron. With no reference whatever to unpleasant topics, Lanphere affixed his signature with that of Cameron, and gave his check for the stipulated amount. So far as outward appearances were concerned, he might have been merely taking over the lease of a hundred acres of wildcat territory.

That afternoon, as Cameron and Harry took the train for Bradan, Harry purchased the last edition of the evening paper, and as the train left the depot he glanced at the market report.

"See, Mr. Cameron," he said, pointing to the headlines, "the settlement of your suit has not cost the Cygnet a penny. The producer and the consumer will foot the bill, and more with it."

And Cameron read that in the afternoon the quotations on crude oil had dropped away twenty points, while the price on refined petroleum had risen fifty cents a barrel!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ONE AFTERNOON.

JUST west of the thriving little city of St. James, Duncan Cameron found the home which he sought—a fertile, fruitful farm, which ran back from the shore of a beautiful lake to a gentle hill, from which there stretched on every side a most pleasing prospect. Here came to the members of his little circle that rest and happiness which is given to those who contentedly pursue congenial and active lives. Cameron devoted himself to his stock and crops, but gave liberally of his time and experience, and often of his means, to furthering the interests of the pursuits in which he engaged. Mrs. Cameron and Agnes were most happy in their home and in their intercourse with the friends of the old days, and such new ones as time had brought into their lives.

Almost fronting the Cameron place was the modest home of Mr. and Mrs. Tubbs and their daughter. The families were inseparable, and as Mr. Tubbs had prospered in his affairs, he had an abundance with

which to procure them a home and to provide for their future, when his thrift and activity were no longer possible. His complete happiness was expressed in a remark to Mr. Fisher, whom he met in the city one day.

"It takes pretty near all of one's life to learn how to live," he said. "But if the lesson is well learned, you can get enough satisfaction outen one year of right livin' to pay for all the other years of hard experience."

Mr. and Mrs. Fisher had a pleasant home in the city, and as Mrs. Fisher had long ago learned that the bauble she so eagerly chased through the first years of their affluence was a mere puff of pretense, they, too, were to be counted among the contented ones.

But there are others of our old friends in this charming little city, and one of them is Harry Edgert, who mysteriously left a good clientage in Oleford and opened an office in St. James, offering no further excuse for the change than to say that as his dear friend Dr. Ross had given up his prosperous practice in Bradan and was moving to the city, he wished to accompany him. These two were almost constant companions, and what more natural than that they should frequently—very frequently, indeed—take their way along the pleasant lake shore road, or row their boat through the outlet of the lake itself to the Cameron Landing?

It was an afternoon in late summer—just when

the harvest apples lose their glistening green and are seen all golden against the banks of leaves; when mellow tints come to the fields and set them ablaze with the stored-up glory of the ripening suns of long, hot weeks—an afternoon that brought the first faint breath of the spicy breezes of autumn, and gave to the lake which shimmered so brightly through the orchard branches a tinge of the violet that comes so deeply when the season lengthens to the time of frosts. Out upon the water a few sail-boats drifted lazily with the light wind, and little spots here and there indicated that the trollers were taking advantage of the last few days of the open season for bass.

“Oh, it is at all times such a beautiful sight,” said Agnes, “that I never tire of it.”

“No,” replied Betsey, “one cannot tire of a view that is never for two hours changed. The shadows, the waves, the tinge of the water, the mirrored reflection of the clouds, the sweeping curves of foam left by steamers or sail-boats, the sparkle from oar-blades, and the drive of tumbling white-caps are ever presenting new effects.”

They were seated under one of the big apple trees in Mr. Cameron’s orchard, and close beside them ran the well-beaten path that led down to boat-house and landing. It was a favorite place for reading and study, and the books over which they had been poring now lay closed on the square of canvas that formed their carpet.

"We have all been so happy here," said Agnes, "that I often fear something will happen to disturb it."

"Oh, no, dear, you must not think that," and Betsey took her companion's hand. "God does not seek out those who are happy and contented as especial subjects upon whom to visit trouble. That we are happy here and now, is of itself no reason why that happiness should be broken, and though sickness or death, or other distress may come at any moment, I cannot believe that it would be sent to us because we are now favored with every wish that heart could desire."

"What a wise little philosopher you have become, Betsey. I really do not know where you get all your ideas, for while I study as hard as you and try to gain a store of wisdom, I never have an original thought, or even a borrowed one, which I can adapt to an occasion?"

Betsey's eyes danced with mischief. "Mr. Edgert says it was an original idea on your part when you insisted that your wedding should take place in the little church which your father and mother used to attend in Scotland," she said.

"Well—" and Agnes blushed very prettily, "it was not an idea—simply an impulse. I haven't told you about it, have I, and I promised to do so, too."

"There's hardly been time, for it was decided only

the night before last, and I saw you but a few moments yesterday."

"You see it was this way: Harry was urging me to set a date in October upon which to be married, and to decide where we should go for our wedding-trip. It flashed upon me—why not get papa and mamma to make their intended visit to their old home right away and I go with them, while Harry, if he wanted me badly enough, could follow us and wed me in Scotland.

"‘Harry,’ I said in a tragically solemn voice, ‘you have told me many times that you love me very deeply.’

"‘Yes, dear, and I do,’ he replied, looking rather surprised and just a little bit alarmed.

"‘Do you love me well enough, Harry, to follow me—well, say to Scotland?’

"‘To Scotland, Agnes! Yes, to the end of the world and back again, a dozen times over. But why do you ask that, dear?’

"‘Because, Harry, I am going to Scotland with my father and mother, late in September, and if you will come to Dunoon we will be married on the sixteenth of October in the little kirk they attended when they were children.’

"‘It was an awful risk, Betsey, for I didn’t know what father would say about it, though I felt rather sure about mother. Ever since Harry and I promised to make our home here with them, they have

been willing to do anything I asked, and so I went ahead, half in jest, planning the wedding as though it had been arranged between us at home. And Harry, the dear old dunce, fell in with the plan as if it were the cleverest idea in the world. Before he left we had arranged for the remainder of our trip and had the time set for our home-coming. I saw then that I would just have to win the consent of papa and mamma, for it would never do to back out after it was all understood with Harry. But that was the easiest part of it, for they have been intending to pay a visit to the old home either this fall or in the spring, and the thought of having their daughter married there was pleasing to both. Father did not wait a moment after we had decided it before he wrote a letter to the Rev. David Purdee at Du-noon, telling him that we were coming, and asking him if it would be agreeable to him to have the wedding in his church. It is going to be just splendid—all but one thing. There's just one feature to regret, dear," concluded Agnes, putting her arms around Betsey's waist.

"And that is what, you dear child?"

"I wanted you with me at the time of my marriage, Betsey. It seems to me that I shall not be happy if you are absent."

"Yes, yes, you will, Agnes. I shall be with you in constant love and good wishes."

"Will you not come with us, Betsey? Father and

mother are both going to urge you, and you know it is my dearest wish."

Betsey's lips trembled and tears filled her eyes. The thought of even a temporary separation from her sweet companion saddened her, but she did not wish to leave her parents entirely alone. She was on the point of replying when their attention was drawn to Harry Edgert, who was approaching from the landing.

"What can be so interesting," he called, "that you should have neither eyes nor ears for the anxious visitors who have been waiting for a welcome at the landing for at least ten minutes? And you especially, Betsey, who was never known to refuse a chance to take a boat ride—do you not know that Dr. Ross has been resting upon his oars until he has again grown weary, and hallooing until he is hoarse from the vain attempt to attract your notice?"

"I don't believe a word of it," replied Agnes. "You stole up to the landing as quietly as possible, probably with muffled oars, hoping to surprise us, and you have been talking in whispers if at all."

"At any rate you cannot deny the evidence of the waiting boatman, who sent me forward to beg the fair lady to accept the tender of an hour's row," and Harry swept his hat from his head and bowed low before the ladies.

Betsey flushed through the smile she gave Harry. "Oh, of course I will go," she said. "As you say, I

was never known to refuse a ride on the lake, in storm or in calm, and I certainly would not do so at this time when two lovers are quite impatient for me to be off, so that they may have the whole orchard to themselves." And she ran from them down the path.

"And two other lovers," said Harry, dropping upon the canvas beside Agnes, "who are just as impatient to get away from everybody else and have the whole lake to themselves."

"Is it true, doctor," said Betsey, as she came to the landing, "that you delegated Mr. Edgert to invite me upon a ride?"

"Indeed, it is, and I beg your pardon for not coming in person. I had a little work upon the rudder, as one of the lines was loosened, and I asked Harry to say to you that the trolling ought to be good this afternoon, and if you cared for it we would go out for an hour."

She took her place in the boat and they moved out upon the lake. Would she throw the spoon and hold the line? the doctor asked. Yes, if the doctor wished, though she thought fishing might not be good here in the path of so many boats. Would it not be a better plan to keep close in-shore and row around toward Long Point, where the water lilies are now at their best? The doctor was delighted to do this, for they could then run out to the deeper water and troll on their return trip. Whereupon they fell into a dis-

cussion concerning the merits of different fishing tackle, and the success of skittering for bass in-shore as compared with trolling further out.

But a man who is very much in love with a woman cannot be kept discussing fishing-tackle with her all afternoon; and a woman who is very much in love with a man, but still is afraid to have him speak, cannot forever find subjects that will keep him away from the point.

They were floating now among the lily pads—the graceful green saucers with their cups of purest white and decorated centers of yellow. Betsey would not pick them, although the doctor hunted out the very largest and brightest, and rowed the boat close beside them. They were so much more beautiful, she said, floating here upon the cool, dark water than they would be in any other place.

Had Agnes Cameron said anything about the somewhat novel plan for her marriage with Harry? Yes, yes, she had been telling something about it this afternoon; but really, didn't the doctor think it very strange that the lily stems should reach up and up, so many yards through the water, and then when they came to the surface send out such beautiful blossoms?

Ross caught the overhanging branches of a great willow, whose trunk, bent down by a storm years before, lay out over the water and formed a natural landing. He drew the boat into one of the forks of

a huge, crooked limb, and when the craft was quite secure he seated himself beside the woman who remained so still and demure, dipping one hand over the side of the boat into the limpid water, with throbbing heart and blanched face, yet with a joy she could not control.

"The groping of the water lilies from the dark bottom of the lake through a fathom of water, pushing on toward the sun, which draws them and which they love, is just a type of my own life," he said, taking her hand. "Love brought me here from Scotland, though I came with a heavy heart, not knowing that it would ever be my right to declare that love. Love and respect, each day growing stronger, have kept me from saying what has been so constantly in my heart, until the time has come when I may speak. It is love for you, Betsey, and I cannot help thinking that you must have known it all along. But I came this afternoon to let you know it from my lips, and to ask you if there may not be two weddings, on the sixteenth of October, in dear old Dunoon, where I first saw you?"

Whether there were tears of happiness in her eyes, or whether he heard from her lips some word which gave him the right, cannot be told, for when she raised her head and looked into his face, the lover caught her in his arms and their lips met in kisses that she did not care to resist.

They came home in the twilight, far beyond the

hour which they had set for their return, and found Agnes and Harry waiting for them at the landing.

"Where are the fish?" asked Harry as the boat approached.

"In the lake," answered the doctor. "We haven't uncoiled a line!"

"You must have had a long ride," said Agnes.

"No, not very long," replied Betsey, demurely. "We went in-shore around the bay through the lily pads to Long Point, and then straight home."

"Oh, and it took you all this time?"

"Yes," very innocently. "We did not row rapidly, the lake was so perfectly lovely to-day."

"Indeed! Did you bring any lilies?"

"No, dear, they were too beautiful to pick."

"Ah, ha, I know where you have been," said Agnes, at that moment observing twigs and leaves of willow in the boat. "Harry, they've been all this time in the branches of the old leaning willow. You and I know what a cosy place it is in which to hide, don't we?"

"Indeed, we do," said Harry, laughingly, as he caught the doctor's hand to help him up to put off the boat. "For we were there on the same errand."

"Betsey," said Agnes, throwing her arms around her friend's shoulders, "look me straight in the eyes and tell me if you are going with me to Scotland."

"Hush, hush, you tease; of course, I am!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE WEDDING DAY.

WHAT a delightful party took passage on the steamer sailing for Glasgow on the first Saturday in October!

There were, first, Mr. and Mrs. Duncan Cameron going back to their old home upon what they declared was their wedding-trip; and with them their daughter, Agnes. Next in order were Mr. and Mrs. James Tubbs, won from their home by the persuasion of their friends; and their handsome daughter, Mrs. Wheeler, who was most solicitous at all times for their comfort and pleasure. And then there were Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Edgert, no longer in the hotel business, but "just looking around the world a bit before settling down." With them were their three daughters, all vivacious and accomplished young women, and Harry, who was ever the life of any party in which he had place. Mr. and Mrs. Arad Fisher, too, who were always pleased to take a jaunt in good company, and who thought of spending the winter at a quiet place in the south of France. And

Dr. William Ross, a serious man upon most occasions, but now as full of buoyant spirits and keen humor as one who might have had his nativity in the Emerald Isle instead of in the land of fogs.

What pranks they played upon each other when out at sea! What songs they sung, and stories they told, and how the cabin echoed with laughter, and when had the deck held another such congenial party?

Did such a guileless, innocent, happy old fellow as Mr. Tubbs ever before make voyage across the Atlantic, scattering his quaint philosophy and homely sayings over everybody from the captain to the cabin boy, and not forgetting his fellow-passengers, with every one of whom he was on speaking terms before the close of the second day out?

Did a ship on the Glasgow line ever carry a passenger who knew more about ships and shipping, sailors and sailing, fish and fishing, than Dr. Ross; and was there such another who could relate with sober countenance and convincing tone of voice so many absurd yarns about the sea?

Did captain, passengers or crew ever spend seven days with one who could laugh with more infectious heartiness, or turn a sally of wit more adroitly than the elder Edgert?

Was there in all the world one with more resources at his command, more mischief in his make-up, or greater tenderness in his love than Harry?

Or, did any traveller ever meet a man who, by

every movement and act, by every word and look, betrayed more complete happiness than that possessed by Duncan Cameron?

And the ladies, old and young, like sisters all, or a company of school girls out on a summer vacation, vieing with each other in the part they might take to make this holiday one never to be forgotten.

The days and nights sped too quickly, and the travellers came to Glasgow before they were ready that the voyage should end. The Rev. Mr. Purdee met them in that city, welcoming his old friends with affection, and greeting the new acquaintances with warmth.

"I tell you, Willie Ross," he said to the doctor when they were at the hotel where rooms had been engaged for the party, "the news of the coming events has made a great stir down in Dunoon."

"Davie, you haven't been spreading it down there, have you?"

"Indeed, I had no occasion to do so, for it doesn't take a paper to circulate a bit of gossip in a Scotch village. When I received Mr. Cameron's second letter, giving me his word that you were about to apply for my services upon an important occasion in your life, I called upon Granny Seaton and told her as much about it as I thought she could bear at one sitting. Before an hour the whole village knew it, and the news was travelling to the country. Why, lad, you are blushing."

"It is high time that he did," said Agnes, "for all the way over he has been telling us the most extravagant stories about the adventures of the fisher-folk and sailors from his old home. It would be strange if his conscience did not reproach him now that he is nearing the scenes of these marvellous adventures and is likely to meet some of the characters face to face."

"Never mind! They will have opportunity to return it all and with interest at the reception on the day of the wedding," declared Mr. Purdee, laughing.

"Heavens, Davie, is it to be a reception?" asked Ross in astonishment.

"Why, man, of course it is. Hasn't Mr. Cameron told you—" The minister paused, seeing that he had unwittingly disclosed a secret.

"It may as well come out first as last," said Duncan, meeting their inquiring looks with a laugh. "I have not had the courage to tell you before, but now that Davie is here to stand by me, I will make a confession. I wrote him that if he considered it proper, he might arrange for a genuine Scotch wedding, and I conclude that he has done so."

"That I have, Duncan, and for a fortnight the country around Dunoon has been preparing for nothing else. Why, on the Sabbath it was almost impossible to get the folk to give attention to the sermon, so full are they of the coming event. The details are complete, and Dunoon impatiently awaits the hour

when it may show its American guests what is meant by a Scotch welcome."

The Rev. Mr. Purdee did not overstate the situation at the little village. For several days, Sandy McLouth had been riding back and forth making preparations for the wedding feast which Duncan Cameron intended to give the people of his native town. The guid wives entered heartily into the event, for Sandy said the siller was plenty and each was to receive pay for what should be furnished. The Craigs and the Laings (distant relatives of Mrs. Cameron) were to furnish fowls, and it was told at the smithy that at least a hundred would be provided for the occasion. Hams and bacon were ordered from the McLeans and the Lambs—neighbors who were famous for the excellence of their breed of pigs, and who knew better than any others how to cure and bring to perfection the product. David Hoag dressed his fattest steer, and it was to be roasted in a brick oven built for the purpose by Archie MacDonald. 'Auld Nannie Cummings and her two daughters and daughter-in-law were busy for days mixing together rich butter, flour and sugar, and baking short bread that could not be excelled in Scotland. To the McKays and Thompsons was given the contract for the fish, and Marget Campbell and Bell Douglas made great baskets full of toothsome oatmeal cakes. Other families were to furnish white bread, marmalade,

sweeties, jam and cheese—all in abundance, for none was to stop short of eating his fill.

The feast was to be served on the great floor of Willie MacKie's new barn, and long white boards were brought from the sawmill and formed into benches and tables for the accommodation of the guests.

The haggis—

“Great chieftain o’ the puddin’-race,”

without which no wedding feast in the “land o’ braw lads and bonnie lassies” would be complete—was product of the combined skill of Mrs. McCritchie and Jean McAllister. As befitted its importance, place was made for it in the center of the long table, and when the time came to serve it, the brides tucked up the dainty laces in their sleeves, and with their most gracious wishes, sent generous slices round the board.

To Bobbie Cruickshank, a man of rare discretion, Sandy had entrusted the duty of serving the spirits.

“Ye are no’ to be sparin’, Bobbie,” said McLouth, “but I’m no’ tellin’ ye that ye are to dispose it too freely. Gie each mon his fu’, but na more than his fu’, for we dinna want oor American veesitors to hae the impression that we are a drinkin’ folk. I wud be ashamed ta sae any mon drunk, even Jock McTavish, who gets fu’ wi a smell of the cork. It wad na

speak weel for the toon. I'm thinkin' that it wad be wisdom ta mix the whusky well wi' water for the first twa or three rounds, and after they ha' had their fling at the tables ye can gie it ta them a bit stronger."

"Ye may hae na fear, McLouth," said Bobbie, reassuringly. "There's nae a mon in Dunoon whose capacity I dinna ken. I'll send them a' hame sober, but happy." And faithfully he kept his word.

At noon in the little kirk, filled to its utmost with the excited and gossiping throng, the marriage ceremony was said, and the two couples went out to mingle in the rejoicings of their friends. There were those in Dunoon who held that Dominie Purdee missed the opportunity of his life to exhort the congregation, but he let them go with a prayer and a benediction that were mercifully brief.

If you should chance to visit Dunoon to-day, you would find those who would be able to give a description of the festivities which followed the ceremony in the kirk. They would tell you of the abundance of the feast, which never lacked in variety or quality, though the tables were filled many times. You would hear of Duncan Cameron's speech and the cheers which followed it; and also of the speech of a little, sharp, old cricket of a man, "father of the bonnie lady whom Willie Ross married." They would describe the reels and jigs to the music of fiddle and pipes, in which the brides and grooms took part with

as keen zest and full enjoyment as the lads and lasses of the native heath. They would relate how the graver folk gathered in groups under the trees on that beautiful October afternoon, and as song and shout of revelry came from the broad floor of the barn, smiled indulgently and pretended not to hear; or, with no outward evidence of curiosity, sought points of vantage whence they could look upon the merry revellers, remembering in their hearts when they were like these and danced the happy hours away.

And then—they would not forget this—they would tell you how, when the carriage came to take away the quartette in whose honor the festival had been held, when the stockings and old shoes were ready to throw, and every hand not otherwise occupied was filled with rice to shower, the two beautiful brides stood upon the seat of the carriage, with the two stalwart grooms supporting them, and waved their pretty hands and called with voices filled with love:—

“Good-by! Good-by! We love you all! Good-by! Good-by!”

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